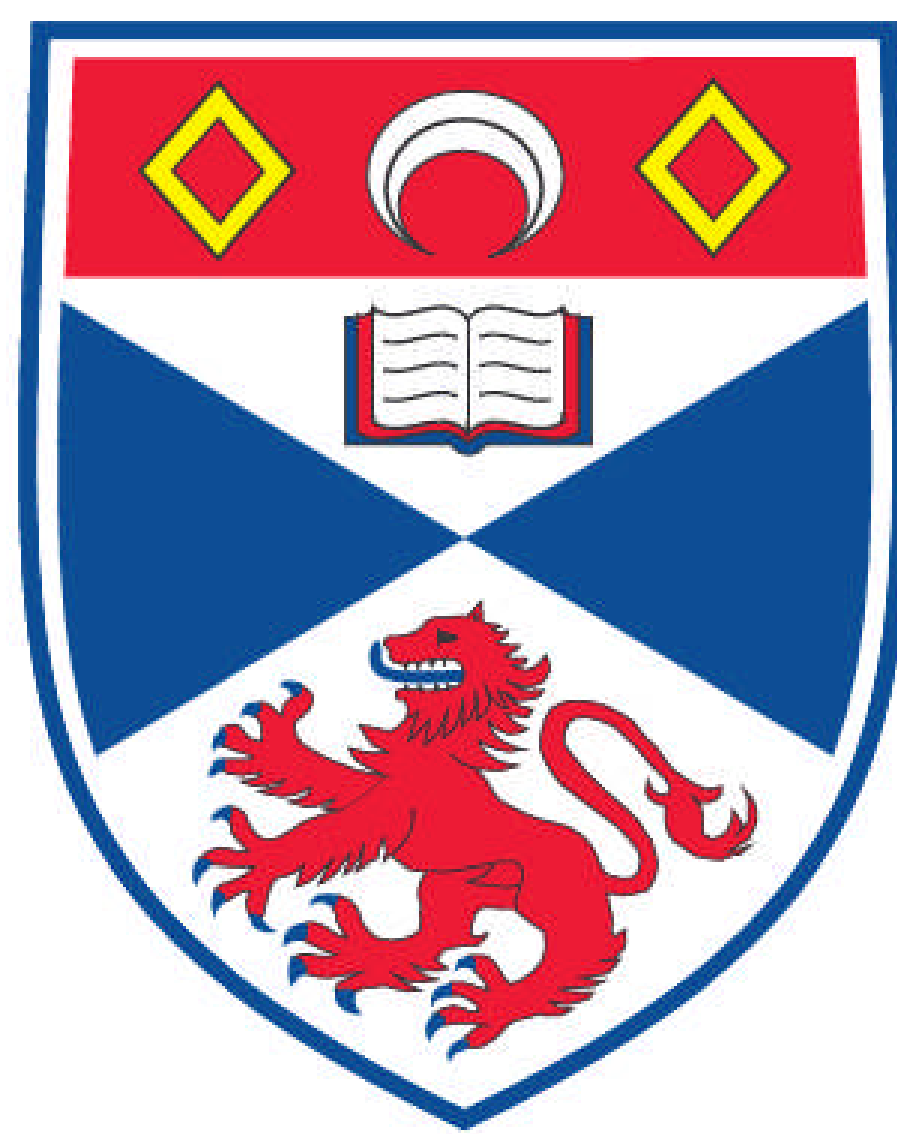


**THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWNING: ITS INHERITANCE AND ITS
INHERITORS**

Janet Hilditch

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St. Andrews**



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The Cloud of Unknowing:
Its Inheritance and its Inheritors

by

JANET HILDITCH

Thesis submitted in application for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Faculty of Divinity, St. Mary's College
at the University of St. Andrews 1987



I certify that Janet Hilditch has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution of the University Court, 1967, No. 1 (as amended), and is qualified to submit this thesis in application for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



I was admitted as a research student under Ordinance 350 (General No. 12) on 1 October 1981 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. under Resolution of the University Court, 1967, No. 1 (as amended) on 1 October 1982.

The following thesis is based on the results of research carried out by myself, in my own composition, and has not previously been presented for a higher degree. The research was carried out in the University of St. Andrews under the supervision of Professor J.K. Cameron.

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Abstract of Thesis 'The Cloud of Unknowing: Its Inheritance and Its Inheritors'.

The thesis attempts a portrait of The Cloud in the context of its position in the history of Christian mysticism. That the anonymous work owed much to spiritual writers of the preceding twelve hundred years is not debatable; what it owed may be slightly less obvious. The Cloud is essentially a work of Dionysian mysticism, and various writers within that tradition who may have influenced or affected the teaching of The Cloud are examined. At the same time, however, the anonymous writer owes much to the western tradition of Augustinian theology, and the role of this, complementary to the Dionysian mysticism, is also considered. In Chapter II we look at the theological doctrine underlying the mystical doctrine of the Cloud corpus. Chapter III has two major parts, both concerned with the influence of The Cloud on the subsequent development of spiritual writing in England. The first considers the relationship with Walter Hilton. The second examines aspects of Puritan thought which may indicate that the influence of The Cloud, after the Reformation, was not restricted to Catholic thought.

I wish to thank a number of people who have contributed to the producing of this work. My supervisor, Professor J.K. Cameron, for all his help and encouragement. Katherine Roberts for the hours and the effort put into the immaculate typing. My parents, who have helped more than they can know. My husband, who has helped and supported me in every way imaginable; and our son, whose contribution is rather harder to define. Thank you very much, all of you.

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PREFACE: THE CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH ON THE CLOUD

Christian spirituality, and specifically mysticism, is currently enjoying a major resurgence of interest, not simply among devout lay-men, but also among scholars of Christian theology, a fact borne witness to both by the numbers of books and articles now appearing on the subject, and by the many new editions of actual mystical texts which now crowd the shelves of all theological bookshops.

Among those many rediscovered works is The Cloud of Unknowing, its very title an invitation to study and read. Many aspects of the work, and the six other treatises almost certainly all penned by the same author have been considered by its commentators - including, very intriguingly, a comparison with Zen Buddhism¹; it may even seem that the last word has been spoken on The Cloud, that every one of its ideas and utterances has been thoroughly examined, and all that is left to would-be commentators is to comment on their fore-runners. Relatively few books are given over entirely to the Cloud corpus, the bulk of study is to be found in general books about mysticism, books on the English mystics in particular, and numerous articles. But among these, a great deal of ground has already been covered, and the major contributor to the collective work on The Cloud, and undisputed expert, is Phyllis Hodgson. In her editions of all the known works of the author in the EETS series, complete with comprehensive introductions, and in numerous articles, she shows herself equally conversant with all the major issues of theology, background sources and influences,

and possible authorship. The other major contributors include Dom David Knowles, Dom Justin McCann, Evelyn Underhill, J.P.H. Clark, Fr. Constantino Nieva and Fr. William Johnston.

Study of the manuscripts of the Cloud corpus has been carried out comprehensively by Dr. Hodgson, who has collated all the information available on each of the seventeen existing manuscripts, which, along with her minute textual study, contributes much to our knowledge of other areas of interest, for example the history of its dissemination, its possible sources, and even the question of authorship.

The issue of authorship is one which, indeed, seemed for a long time to dominate all study, even over and above that of the content of the works. However, we must ask whether the answer is any nearer than it was in 1500 when Grenehalgh first attempted to end the mystery by identifying the anonymous man with Walter Hilton. Hilton is undoubtedly the most serious contender for the title, his claims being considered over and again in this century alone by Dom Noetinger², Dom McCann³, Dr. Hodgson⁴, Ms. Gardner⁵, and Fr. Nieva⁶. It would certainly be a convenient solution, but it is by no means a convincing one. The relationship between the author of The Cloud and Hilton is discussed at length below; suffice it to say here that, in this thesis, they are not regarded as being one and the same person. To claim that, as strong evidence shows us,⁷ because two men lived in the same area, at the same time, and wrote on the same subject, they were in fact one man, involves a tremendous leap of logic which in fact is too weak to withstand the weight of other evidence.

Inevitable failure to name the man who wished to remain nameless has led to the attempt to paint a picture of him at least, even if it is impossible to put a name beneath it. Again, a great deal of this must be conjecture, some of which may be more valuable than the rest. The one certain thing is that he was a mystic well advanced in the contemplative life; as regards anything else, where there is no proof, some conclusions are at least more probable than others. For example, Fr. Nieva seems to wish to intimate that the writer need not necessarily have been an ordained priest⁸. Against this is his respect for the authority of the priesthood coupled with his own very obvious tone of authority. There is likewise discussion as to whether the author was a recluse, a member of an enclosed order, or lived as a secular priest. In The Cloud itself we find evidence that he had lived the communal life⁹, which suggests an order, but not the Carthusian, however tempting this association is when we consider the many links between The Cloud and the Carthusians¹⁰. Such discussion, while interesting, is not necessarily enlightening, and it seems that, in the study of The Cloud the chapter on authorship has been winding to a necessarily inconclusive and really rather welcome close. What the corpus of writings has to say is of far greater value than the identity of its author, and when our understanding of it is not impaired by his anonymity, it is perhaps as well to leave it so.

This is not the case, however, with another area which has likewise already been the subject of much scrutiny and study, namely, the literary sources of The Cloud. As with the

authorship, it is a study which can never be 'concluded', but there is both more scope, and more justification, for research in this area. A great deal has been carried out by the aforementioned scholars, but it is such a vast field that there still remains much to be done. One very common fault among studies already carried out is that, while names are mentioned with great frequency, not much more is done with them, there is little attempt to describe how St. Bernard, William of St. Thierry, St. Bonaventura et al influenced the English writer. On the other hand, while in his article 'Sources and Theology in The Cloud of Unknowing' J.P.H. Clark¹¹ looks in considerable depth and detail at many possible influences, he does so in such a disorganised, almost haphazard fashion that the reader, while potentially enlightened, may also be highly confused; there is a need for an approach which falls somewhere between these two extremes.

In contrast to the above, where much work has been carried out, we come to an area of almost completely untapped potential, namely the language of The Cloud. In 1980 V. Lagerno¹² pointed this out, but since then there have been no significant advances. Apart from Dr. Hodgson's work, and one article by J.A. Burrow¹³, little has been done, and R.W. Chambers' belief that The Cloud is worthy of study as a work of literature as well as of theology¹⁴, and is an important land mark in the development of the English literary tradition as well as the mystical tradition, seems to have awakened little enthusiasm. This may be because it is a study which belongs to two academic

spheres, literature and theology, and few scholars in either feel qualified to attempt it. For this reason, in this thesis at least, it is not attempted, while the need for and great potential value of such work is acknowledged.

While exposition of the ideas of The Cloud is rampant, much less work has been done on the theology which lies behind these ideas. This is somewhat ironic, for while the former is of limited value, tending to confuse what is already clearly stated by its author, the latter is more necessary in that, at least, he does not state his theological views as openly or as concisely as he discusses the mystical life. Going behind the scenes, as it were, helps our understanding of mysticism, for we see it against its background of highly developed and analytical thought. While rejecting the way of the intellect in favour of the way of love, the contemplative has yet to come via the way of the intellect. This is an area where some work has already been done, notably by Dom David Knowles, but which still has considerable potential for more.

Finally, to an area which, like that of The Cloud's language, is largely untapped - the question of the place of The Cloud in the later English spiritual tradition. There is a tendency to think of "the English mystics" only as that group of people - Richard Rolle, the anonymous author of The Cloud, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and Walter Hilton - who flourished in the Middle Ages. Strictly speaking they are the true English mystics, but there were many later spiritual writers in England, and it is hard to believe that they could have ignored their great inheritance simply because a reformation of the English

Church stood between the two. It is the contention of this thesis that The Cloud and other mystical works survived through that reformation, not only to take their place among the devout Catholic community, but also among the fiercely Protestant Puritans, to continue as an essential part of the English religious heritage.

The above indicates some areas where study is both possible and desirable; the undertaking of this work as carried out below forms an attempt at a portrait of The Cloud, a viewing of its position in the history of theology in general, and mysticism in particular.

FOOTNOTES TO PREFACE

1. W. Johnston, The Mysticism of The Cloud of Unknowing, Desclee, New York, 1967. Fr. Johnston concludes very firmly that any similarities are superficial only, in their fundamentals Zen Buddhism and the mysticism of The Cloud are worlds apart.
2. M. Noetinger, 'The Authorship of the 'Cloud of Unknowing'', Blackfriars, vol. 4, 1924, pp. 1457-1464.
3. J. McCann, 'The Cloud of Unknowing', Ampleforth Journal, vol. 29, 1924, pp. 192-197.
4. P. Hodgson, 'Walter Hilton and The Cloud: A Problem of Authorship Reconsidered', Modern Language Review, vol. 50, 1955, pp. 395-406.
5. H.L. Gardner, 'Walter Hilton and the Authorship of 'The Cloud of Unknowing'' Review of English Studies vol. 9, 1933, pp. 129-147.
6. C. Nieva, This Transcending God. Mitre Press, London, 1971.
7. That is, the linguistic evidence, from study of the existing manuscripts, as carried out by Dr. Hodgson and described in P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling, published for The Early English Text Society Oxford University Press, London, 1944, pp. 1xix-1i.
Hereafter cited as The Cloud.
8. C. Nieva, This Transcending God, pp. 34, 35.
9. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 96-100.

10. The links between The Cloud and the Charterhouse of Mount Grace in Yorkshire are particularly strong; Richard Methley, of Mount Grace, translated it into Latin, in the fifteenth century. One manuscript annotated by the Carthusian Greenhalgh was connected with Mount Grace; another belonged to the London Charterhouse.
11. J.P.H. Clark, 'Sources and Theology in 'The Cloud of Unknowing'', The Downside Review, vol. 98, 1980, pp. 83-109.
12. V. Lagerno, 'New Avenues of Research in the English Mystics', The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, The Exeter Symposium, July 1980, ed. M. Glasscoe, University of Exeter, 1980, pp. 234-249.
13. J.A. Burrows, 'Fantasy and Language in 'The Cloud of Unknowing'', Essays in Criticism, vol. 27, 1977, pp. 283-298.
14. N. Harpsfield, The Life and Death of St. Thomas More, Early English Text Society, Oxford University Press, London 1932, introduction by R.W. Chambers, pp. xlv-clxxiv.

It may be helpful at this point to recall the main emphases of the mystical teaching of The Cloud, which is in its essentials very simple and straightforward.

Man is separated from God by original sin, and consequently as long as he remains in this life there is between him and God a dark cloud, the cloud of unknowing. But it is still man's natural end to see and know God, and some are called to perfection, to achieve a vision in this life. This comes to only a few, those chosen to lead the contemplative rather than the active life, and it is not possible to achieve it by hard work, for grace, not personal piety or virtue, determines who can reach contemplative union.

However, man can and must contribute towards his own spiritual growth. Grace stirs love of God, but the contemplative himself sustains it, deliberately devoting his whole self to pure and single-minded love of God. To achieve this, he must empty himself of all things and thoughts connected with this world, putting them under a cloud of forgetting. The hardness of this work cannot be over-emphasised, and there will be constant temptations to let the mind wander, deliberate attempts on the part of the devil to distract the contemplative. There will be dark and painful moments, when the awareness of grace is lost, but the contemplative must hold fast to his desire for God, which both shields him and helps him onward; for as he strives to penetrate the dark cloud of unknowing with this longing love, God will occasionally send down shafts of light. These will be only foretastes of what will come, for there can never be clear vision and full union in this life. Thus it is

the essence of the contemplative life, not only that it carries on into heaven, but also that it reaches its fullness there, where God is not only loved and desired, but also clearly seen and fully known.

CHAPTER 1

THE INFLUENCES: THE DIONYSIAN TRADITION

In a study of the sources of The Cloud there will always be two major weaknesses. The first, stemming from The Cloud is that, except for a very few exceptions, no influence is acknowledged and thus for the most part we are always discussing possible or at least probable sources. The second weakness, which is an essential part of such a quest is that we must, somewhere, come to an almost arbitrary halt; in theory, we could always go back one step further, and were the material available we could doubtless find roots of The Cloud in some primaeval tribal spirituality. This is not the aim of this thesis; not will there be an attempt to discern and discuss every writer who might possibly have influenced the author in however small a way. The thesis is in essence an attempt at a portrait of The Cloud and while background influences are a very necessary part of this, they are only a part. Therefore, we only wish to trace the sources, where these exist, of some of the major concepts.

Clearly, these will not be found in individual writers exactly as they appear in The Cloud, for a notion which originated with an individual, after being accepted into a tradition, could be altered considerably through its treatment in commentaries. Thus, for example, the versions of Dionysius' writings used by The Cloud's author, by Gallus and

Sarracenus, presented a very different picture to the medieval writer of the Syrian's original thoughts. As well as these changes, there is the English author's own very individual stamp, with which he did not fail to endow any part of his works, for he was no plagiarist, but rather used other writers where their ideas were sympathetic to his own outlook.

Therefore, it should not be thought that in seeking the sources of The Cloud we are expecting to find, for example, an exact reproduction of the understanding of love between man and God as found in St Bernard; echoes indicative of a similar atmosphere are what we are more likely to find.

As will become clear, the anonymous author was both widely read, and willing to draw on all that he came across. For this reason he is not easy to classify, but stands more in a tradition of his own. He is, of course, regarded as a mystic of the Dionysian school, but to leave it at that is to undervalue him, for the Augustinian echoes are strong also, and throughout a careful balance is maintained. It is very easy to exaggerate the east/west division in spirituality as in doctrinal theology, but subtle differences are there, and it says much for the author of The Cloud that in his writings an unstrained synthesis is achieved as he draws on writers of both traditions. In truth, of course, Dionysius was the inspiration for nearly all western writers when their attention was focused on mysticism, even when their theology was strictly Augustinian - Richard of St Victor and St Bonaventura are prime examples of this. For this reason, while in the study below there is a rough

categorisation into Augustinian and Dionysian, Richard of St Victor appears in both sections, his theological influence being Augustinian and his mystical influence Dionysian.

It would, however, be wrong to begin our quest for the sources of The Cloud only with Dionysius. There would be considerable justification for going back to Origen, for in him we find strong hints of what would later be termed the Beatific Vision. But at the same time it would be well to remember that he was regarded with considerable suspicion by the orthodox, and I would suggest that instead we might look to a thoroughly orthodox churchman who, while attracted to and influenced by the ideas of Origen, tempered these with considerable regard for the accepted limits of orthodoxy¹, and so made the tentative beginnings of what would, with the contributions of the ... centuries, develop into the medieval mysticism of The Cloud. For in Gregory of Nyssa, particularly in his Life of Moses we find much which binds it to later works of mysticism, for all that it should, with accuracy, be described only as a work of spirituality. Thus, in the search for sources of The Cloud, we begin with the fourth century Cappadocian Father.

It must be emphasised that here we are dealing with a work that is purely spiritual and not mystical. This puts it in a quite different arena from The Cloud which, while not at all technical in the way of the Spanish mystics, nevertheless came as the climax of a highly developed and complex tradition, in contrast to Gregory who stood right at its start. It might be

expected that similarities to the mystical school would more probably be found among the Desert Fathers than in an orthodox churchman better known for his theological writings than his spiritual. But in his Life of Moses Gregory displays distinct similarities to and sympathy for the outlook that, in time, would develop into the mystical tradition as it was understood in the Middle Ages. The first such is his understanding of God, and his choice of the via negativa. For Gregory, God is True Being, in whom all created things participate and 'the characteristic of the divine nature is to transcend all characteristics'². Consequently God cannot be known; 'This Being is inaccessible to knowledge'³, 'none of those things known by human comprehension is to be ascribed to him'⁴ 'all names have equally fallen short of accurate description, both those recognised as insignificant as well as those by which some great insight is indicated'⁵. In this view of God, and the conviction that human language and human understanding are totally inadequate to the task of grasping the divine person, Gregory already stands well within the mainstream of the neo-Platonically based mystical philosophy.

In his understanding of man and the spiritual life Gregory again shows himself to stand on ground common to the later mystics. It must be borne in mind that Moses is not depicted as a mystic seeking union with God, yet his journey through life bears many striking resemblances to the mystic way. In the first place, it is made clear that Moses was not an 'ordinary' Christian, in that not all could ascend as high as he did; 'The

knowledge of God is a mountain steep indeed and difficult to climb - the majority of people scarcely reach its base'⁶. 'For the truth of reality is truly a holy thing, a holy of holies, and is incomprehensible and inaccessible to the multitude'⁷. This is very faint when compared with the exclusivism of The Cloud and its author's fierce desire that his work be kept from the eyes of the unworthy but it shows, at least, Gregory's awareness that the spirituality of which he writes is of a higher category than most Christians'. He does not speak outright of Moses as being especially chosen by God, although he does refer to God's adapting his message to the powers of the hearer; what he does emphasise is the importance of the free will of men in determining their fate. 'People live differently - some live uprightly in virtue while others slide into vice. One would not reasonably attribute these differences in their lives to some divine constraint which lies outside themselves. It lies within each person's power to make this choice'⁸...'but we men have in ourselves, in our own nature and by our own choice, the causes of light or of darkness, since we place ourselves in whichever sphere we wish to be'⁹. There is no development of the doctrine of original sin as the cause of men's ability to choose evil rather than good, but he clearly believed in the freedom of the individual to choose his fate, and the importance of the will towards good.

Having chosen good, as Moses did, the life of the spiritual man is then looked at closely as he progresses towards that perfection which Gregory believes is within his grasp - 'For the

perfection of human nature consists perhaps in its very growth in goodness'¹⁰. In this quest for perfection, Gregory insists, it is very valuable to lead a solitary life - or at least, to keep away from those inimical to the pursuit; 'In the same way we shall live a solitary life, no longer entangled with adversaries or mediating between them, but we shall live among those of like disposition and mind who are fed by us while all the movements of our soul are shepherded, like sheep, by the will of guiding reason'¹¹. This shows how far removed Gregory was from the mentality of the Desert Fathers, for he clearly believed a communal life could be helpful for the spiritual man. This rather casual attitude to the question of the eremitic life as against the communal life is one which is common to many of the later mystics, including the author of The Cloud, although the reasons behind it do seem to differ between the fourth century and the fourteenth. For the later writers, the mystic is so wrapped up in the movement of his own will towards God that the outside world is almost un-noticed, for them, the solitary life refers to the state of the mind, or the soul, rather than the body. For Gregory this is not the case, he seems rather to envisage a band of faithful souls travelling together, an altogether less intense journey.

As the journey is begun, it is emphasised that there must be a process of self-purification; 'Everyone who looks to God and the Law is purified by the death of his evil habits'¹². 'He who would approach the knowledge of things sublime must first purify his manner of life from all sensual and irrational

emotion. He must wash from his understanding every opinion derived from some preconception and withdraw himself from his customary intercourse with his own comparison, that is, with his sense perceptions which are, as it were, wedded to our nature as its companion.'¹³ Significantly, it is not only our sinful thoughts and practices which must be put down, but all thoughts originating in our earthly minds - a hint, perhaps, of the cloud of forgetting, or at least of the notion of self-emptying common to so many mystics. Another hint of things to come is found in Gregory's claim that 'the voice which is melodious and ascends to God's hearing is not the cry made with the organs of speech, but the meditation sent up from a pure conscience'.¹⁴ Much later on, we find the medieval mystics advocating the power of silent prayer although it must be noted that Gregory is not comparing silent prayer with the set prayers of the church genuinely spoken by the true believer, but with the empty and meaningless noises of the hypocrite. Yet there is in the early writer the emphasis on inner devotion, and an apparent disregard for externals which was to be so common among later mystical writers, the latter leaving them prey to many charges from the more conventionally orthodox.

As a direct result of the special closeness between the spiritual man and God, which stems from this inward communion, he is made particularly able to help others. 'A person like this becomes able to help others to salvation'.¹⁵ This is indeed strongly echoed in *The Cloud* - 'Alle men levyng in erthe ben wonderfulli holpen of this werk, thou wost not how'.¹⁶

Linked with this is the concept of spiritual directorship, the idea that those well advanced along the mystical way, as well as those simply leading a good, spiritual life, should help those who are coming after them. Moses himself was very obviously presented as a prototype of the spiritual director, although he led many rather than the one which was more common in later times - 'The multitude was not capable of hearing the voice from above but relied on Moses to learn by himself the secrets and to teach the people whatever doctrine he might learn through instruction from above. This is also true of the arrangement in the Church. Not all thrust themselves toward the apprehension of the mysteries, but choosing from among themselves someone who is able to hear things divine, they give ear gratefully to him, considering trustworthy whatever they might hear from someone initiated into the divine mysteries'.¹⁷ This obvious shoot from the concept of priesthood was to have developed, by the late Middle Ages, into the phenomenon of the mystic, or ordinary spiritual man as in the case of Walter Hilton, having a special relationship of guidance and aid with either a lay person, or a fellow member of an order. Were it not for such a pattern, we would not have The Cloud or The Epistle of Privy Counsel, both written by such a spiritual director to his young pupil.

The above instances of likenesses between Gregory of Nyssa and later mystics are all, in their way, interesting, although proving nothing. However, we cannot take such a noncommittal attitude to those descriptions of the actual encounter between Moses and God in The Life of Moses, which foreshadow all later

writers of the Dionysian school and The Cloud in particular. The same strength of vision and use of paradox is there, in the notion that God is encountered and seen in darkness: 'What does it mean that Moses entered the darkness and then saw God in it? Scripture teaches by this that religious knowledge comes at first to those who receive it as light ... But as the mind progresses and ... comes to apprehend reality ... it keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence's yearning for understanding it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God. This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness.'¹⁸ This is the very hall-mark of what is known as Dionysian mysticism, yet Gregory of Nyssa preceded Dionysius, and was his major influence and to Gregory credit must be paid for his great gift to later mysticism of such a vision and use of language.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to suggest that Moses' encounter with God in the darkness is the same as the mystic's contemplative union with God. For nowhere is Moses' experience described as an actual union; Moses and God remain distinct throughout, and after the experience Moses returns down the mountain, the same person he was when he entered the cave, enlightened but not changed, with no indication that at the end of his life he will achieve union. For in Gregory's description

of Moses' death, the supreme goal achieved, the meaning is clear; Moses can truly be called the servant of God, he 'was transformed to such a degree of glory'¹⁹, but he is evidently not united with God. Thus, while the encounter of which Gregory writes is described in a way so close to that of later mystics, yet the ultimate meaning and outcome of that encounter is very different.

This is by no means the only difference between Gregory and the medieval writers. The temporal gap alone ensured this; one thousand years of advance in spiritual doctrine resulted in a much greater degree of sophistication among mystical writers, and developements in doctrinal areas also contributed much. In Gregory's account of the spiritual life there is hardly anything of the darker side of mysticism, the pain and effort and sense of loss and loneliness which so characterises the mystic's journey towards union. Moses' life, as he moves closer towards God, is not an easy one, the mountain is 'steep indeed and difficult to climb'²⁰, but it is a far step from this to the desolation described so vividly in The Cloud and The Ascent of Mount Carmel. This is partly, of course, because the goal of which Gregory writes is nowhere as great as that towards which the mystics aim. While Moses reaches perfection, it is the perfection of man as made in the image of God, not the perfection of the soul to be united with God. Also, Gregory

was unaffected, for both temporal and geographical reasons, by developments of the doctrine of original sin. Of course, the east too had its explanation of the barrier between man and God, in the form of man's createdness, but because Gregory was not concerned with an ultimate fusion of souls, this problem does not apply here, and he seems to begin with a higher estimation of man than is usual in succeeding writers. There is in Gregory no suggestion of the belief that man can never leave behind him the effects of original sin: 'The Law gives us to understand by this that no remnant of evil should mix with the subsequent life. Rather we should make a totally new beginning in life after these things, breaking the continuity with evil by a radical change for the better'.²¹ Contrasting this with 'I mene of the pyne of thi special fordone synnes, & not of the pyne of the original synne. For that pyne schal always last on thee to thi deeth day, be thou never so besi',²² we see how much harder a task was envisaged by the medieval mystics than by Gregory.

The concomitants of this are manifold, ranging from lack of a developed doctrine of grace, to his very positive attitude towards 'profane education', and the end result is that, in many ways, not surprisingly, Gregory differs greatly from the medieval writers. In no way did he pass on a complete spirituality for the use of later writers. What he did do was to draw and develop from the dangerous and suspect writings of

Origen the seeds of a concept and an atmosphere which were seminal to the whole mystical ideal, and which were to spread, through the writings of his follower Dionysius rather than his own, through to medieval England and appear, among others, in the anonymous Cloud.

From Gregory of Nyssa to Dionysius the pseudo-Areopagite is both a short step historically and an obvious one. For, while the lack of a history of transmission of texts makes it impossible to prove that the Cappadocian was known in fifth century Syria, comparison of the two writers makes it almost equally impossible to believe that Gregory was not known by the Syrian writer, who was to become arguably the greatest influence on medieval theologians. Although first mentioned in the west by Gregory the Great, he became more accessible when his writings were translated, at the request of Charles the Bald, by John Scotus Erigena. The discovery of his assumed identity and subsequent loss of credibility cannot really affect the value of his writings, nor detract from his position as single most quoted authority by St. Thomas Aquinas.

His influence on western mystics of the apophatic tradition is everywhere acknowledged, and The Cloud in particular is regarded as a real chip off the old block. That its author was fully aware of his debt is evident in the fact that Dionysius is the only influence acknowledged,²³ accordingly, in previous work on the sources of The Cloud, Dionysius has been the subject of more study than anyone else. It is, indeed, extremely difficult

to attempt to pin down the likenesses between the two to particular points. The atmosphere and temperament is so very similar it may seem like comparing an echo with the original sound - it has changed, taken on a life and personality of its own, but almost indefinably.

The very phrase 'the cloud of unknowing' which to the author summed up and expressed so perfectly his understanding of the contemplative way that he used it as the title of his major work, came down to him from Dionysius although Dr Hodgson points out that the image of a cloud was common, and inclines to the view that it came to the English author via Richard of St Victor, who actually uses the phrase nubes ignorantiae,²⁴ but ultimately, of course, this too was adapted from Dionysius' 'darkness of unknowing'. This acts as a pointer to the relationship between the writings of Dionysius and the Cloud corpus; for just as the author drew from Dionysius a phrase which described so well the contemplative vision of God, so in the Mystical Theology as a whole we find the philosophical background to his understanding of the contemplative life. Indeed, Dom McCann suggests that Deonise Hid Divinite might have been written to justify The Cloud and its attitude to contemplation.²⁵ Certainly, reading the Mystical Theology gives an insight into the anonymous author's outlook, and the two complement each other, the one being essentially a work of philosophy, the other a guide to devotional practice which is the direct outcome of that philosophy.

The principal legacy which Dionysius passed on to so many mystical writers, including the author of The Cloud, was of course the use of the via negativa, the reasons for which are fully explained in the Mystical Theology which of all the known works of the Syrian was most influential. All human speech about God is inadequate and therefore inaccurate, and cannot lead to a true understanding of him. Only by saying what God is not can we come close to saying what he is ' - like as men who, carving a statue out of marble, remove all the impediments that hinder the clear perceptive of the latent image and by this mere removal display the hidden statue itself in its hidden beauty'.²⁶ This, which begins essentially as a philosophical doctrine, has many theological implications, both for Dionysius himself, and for his followers. It is impossible for the human intellect to grasp the Divine, therefore it should not even try to understand it; instead a higher power is implied, by which it is made possible for men to approach God and see something of his power. In Dionysius this is not named, but as we will see, by the Middle Ages it has been made clear that this is the power of the will, love for God. In order that this 'highest faculty' take over, and the mystic be allowed to climb towards an understanding of God, it is necessary to leave behind all earthly things and thought - the concept of self-emptying which came from Plotinus and was to become such an essential part of western mysticism, is thus an essential part of the via negativa; 'I counsel that, in the earnest exercise of mystic contemplation, thou leave the senses and the activities of the

intellect and all things that the senses or the intellect can perceive, and all things in this world of nothingness, or in that world of being, and that, thine understanding being laid to rest, thou strain (so far as thou mayest) towards an union with Him whom neither being nor understanding can contain'.²⁷ It has been suggested²⁸ that the union which Dionysius envisages is primarily a union of the intellect, and therefore not the union of love which later Christian mystics describe; but there are two objections to this. First, it is difficult to see how this fits in with Dionysius' often repeated injunction that the intellect is left behind, that human understanding cannot grasp the Divine - 'plunging into the Darkness which is above the intellect'.²⁹ Secondly, that while there is certainly something missing, namely the motivating force, in Dionysius' account of the soul's journey to and union with God, while he does not name love as the power by which this is achieved, it is hinted at and implied throughout his description. St Augustine's teaching on the power of the will, which was so important to later, western mystics was not an influence on the Syrian writer, and it is almost as if he were struggling towards an idea which he could not fully grasp or express. The language he uses when speaking of the movement towards God is the same as that which later mystics use when speaking of the impulse of love: '... strain towards an union with Him whom neither being nor understanding can contain'.³⁰ 'It breaks faith and plunges the true initiate unto the Darkness of Unknowing wherein he renounces all the apprehensions of his understanding and is enwrapped in

that which is wholly intangible and invisible, belonging wholly to Him that is beyond all things and to no-one else ...³¹ In Gregory of Nyssa we saw how, while the idea of the perfection of the human soul was present, the notion of the union with God had yet to develop; here in Dionysius, less cautious, more ready to use Origen's more daring ideas untempered by orthodoxy, great advances have been made, although there is still a long way to go before we come to the completed notion of a union with God by love, as found in The Cloud. We must ask ourselves at this point if this lack in Dionysius means that, ultimately, his union is quite different from that of the later mystics. The love which in The Cloud enables contemplative union means that there is something beyond the darkness and unknowing, namely the Beatific Vision, which will come at the end of the mystic's life on this earth. Does Dionysius have any hopes of this? Certainly, because of his use of paradoxical language, his darkness is not simply lack of light, on the contrary it is a darkness in which is light and vision, but there is no mention of a vision greater, more complete than this, to come after death. It may be that, as either his temperament or the age he lived in did not allow him to have love as the force which motivates the mystic towards God, the consequent effect on the actual notion of the union itself was that it still fell far short of that of the medieval mystics, even although he was so close to them in many ways. Nevertheless, his union is not so far from them that it could be described as an intellectual one.

Thus, the choice of the via negativa which was Dionysius' first legacy to his followers involved much more than the simple denial of the validity of attributing human characteristics to God, for it implied an approach to and relationship with him which would be impossible with the via positiva.

Characteristically, Dionysius carried his use of the apophatic way to extremes not possible for those concerned to stay within the limits of orthodoxy, but he provided both a philosophical framework and an outlook which were to prove invaluable to those who came after him.

The use of the via negativa and all it implied was the major way in which Dionysius influenced The Cloud, but there are other areas where his touch is apparent also. Most notably, the language of Dionysius is the language of The Cloud; we have already remarked on how Dionysius' 'darkness of unknowing' expressed so perfectly the medieval writer's understanding of contemplative union, and throughout the two writers there is an almost uncanny likeness of expression. Neither hesitates to twist, almost distort language, regardless of convention, to express his thoughts, the only difference being that while Dionysius does this constantly, the English writer's language comes down to earth when he does, so that the brilliant and daring language is interspersed with thoroughly homely phrases. Both writers make use of the language of force when discussing the mystical journey to God, so that Dionysius speaks of the 'plunge into the Darkness'³² 'straining towards the living angelic powers'³³, and The Cloud urges the contemplative to

'smyte apon that thicke cloude of vnknowing'³⁴ and 'swink & swete in al that thou canst & mayst'.³⁵ However, it is in their descriptions of the encounter between God and the soul that Dionysius and the anonymous writer are most strikingly similar. Essentially, both are agreed that the experience is ineffable: 'For the more that we soar upwards the more our language becomes restricted.'³⁶ 'For of that werke that fallith to only God dar I not take apon me to speke with my blabryng fleschely tonge.'³⁷ Nevertheless, even in their description of that ineffability they envisage the same thing, a darkness which is essentially light. Dionysius speaks of 'the Ray of that divine Darkness',³⁸ of the 'unchangeable mysteries of heavenly Truth ... hidden in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their darkness'.³⁹ In The Cloud the use of paradox is not so remarkable, but it is made clear that in the darkness God is seen: 'Than wil he sumtyme parauenture seend out a beme of goostly light, peersyng this cloude of vnknowing that is betwix thee & hym, & schewe thee sum of his priuete.'⁴⁰

There are other areas where Dionysius may be seen to be followed by the author of The Cloud, although these are less unique to the sixth century writer, and may have come from other authorities. First is Dionysius' insistence that the soul has an innate longing for God, put there by the Divine Being; 'The Good God ... fills every heavenly mind with spiritual light ... and stirs and opens the eyes which are fast shut and weighed down with darkness, and gives them first a moderate

illumination, then (when they taste the Light and desire it more) the giveth Himself in greater measure.'⁴¹ This yearning for the Good, which is a part of all mystical works including The Cloud⁴², is directly traceable to the neo-Platonists and as stated above could have come to The Cloud from any of a number of sources, including St. Augustine. This is also true of the recognition that the journey to the Divine will be a difficult one - 'ceasing not through weariness or want of courage in such search for Divine Truth'.⁴³ We have seen in Gregory of Nyssa that this, while suggested, has a long way to go until it is as developed as among medieval and later writers, and so with Dionysius. Finally, we come to Dionysius' statement that things are revealed to the individual according to his power to receive them. 'Divine things are revealed into each created spirit in proportion to its powers'.⁴⁴ The corollary of this is that some people are more in need of spiritual help and comfort than others, as the author of The Cloud states.⁴⁵ Again, it would be straining a point to attempt to trace this back to Dionysius.

However, there may be a strong temptation to try and see more of Dionysius in The Cloud than there actually is. In an attempt to minimise this, J.P.H. Clark points out that 'The Dionysian element, modified in the Latin tradition, is only one among others, even in The Cloud and The Epistle of Privy Counsel',⁴⁶ and goes on to show how many other influences were at work. Almost without exception, however, these influences are in the sphere of doctrine, and one would not wish to argue that, doctrinally, Dionysius was an influence on The Cloud.

The medieval writer was too orthodox, and too anxious to be seen as orthodox, for that. Consequently, it would be mistaken to look upon his mysticism as an unstirred reflection of Dionysius'. The doctrinal element, and others, are an intrinsic part of The Cloud, and we have seen above, for example, how this makes a difference between Dionysius' concept of the union with God, and that of The Cloud. Nevertheless, if Gregory of Nyssa made the first tentative steps toward the notion of a union with God, Dionysius' progress was more in the form of giant leaps, and he should not be dismissed as merely 'one element' in the mysticism of The Cloud, for he is in truth the major element. His expansion of the via negativa constitutes the very backbone of The Cloud's mysticism, providing the philosophical framework without which - despite the theological contribution - it could not have developed as it did.

A period of little advance in theology is of necessity also one of little advance in mystical thought, and consequently we must jump several hundred years to come to another major influence on The Cloud, to the abbey of St. Victor and the persons of Hugh and Richard. The English writer's knowledge and evaluation of Richard's work is attested to by his translation and paraphrase of Richard's treatise on contemplative prayer; Benjamin Minor, as well as by direct references to and use of this and Benjamin Major throughout his other works. Hugh's influence is less obvious, perhaps he is important rather as an indirect source for The Cloud, yet there are definite echoes of his words and ideas too, if in less abundance than Richard's.

Hugh's progress in both areas of speculative theology and mysticism was not inconsiderable, although it is for the former that he is better known. A scholar who lived in the dawn of the scholastic age, he held all learning to be of great importance to the theologian, and this, with his faith in the powers of reason, would make him seem an unlikely planting-ground for any doctrine of mystical knowledge. But in this he was merely part of a tradition which was to continue through the scholastic period, until Ockham, when faith in the powers of man was accompanied by the recognition that these only extend so far, and true, intimate knowledge of God depends on something much higher. Hugh's mysticism was not Dionysian in that he did not follow the via negativa, there is no absorption into the divine, but he drew on the Dionysian tradition fusing it with the Augustinian and divided the hierarchy of knowledge into three, cogitation, meditation, and contemplation, which Richard was to expand on in Benjamin Major.

Hugh begins with the fundamental mystical tenet, based in neo-Platonism, that the human heart is restless and searching for a peace which can only be found in God, the reason for this being that man was created to contemplate and love God alone, but because of sin was turned away from this purpose, 'for the mind that knows not to love its true good is never stable and never rests. Hence restlessness, and ceaseless labour, and disquiet, until the man turns and adheres to him'.⁴⁷ In the search for God knowledge and love, truth and virtue are inextricably bound together. Thus to find the divine truth it

is necessary to lead a virtuous life. There is an element of this in The Cloud, but with considerable emendations. Hugh lays emphasis on the importance of recognition of one's own sins and on donning 'the garments of good works'⁴⁸ almsgiving, prayer, and fasting; this is what he means when he talks of purification and preparation for God. For the later writer, the recognition of one's own sin and the conscious doing of good, the morally virtuous life, are of secondary value - imperfect humility and imperfect charity. Perfect humility and perfect charity consist respectively of recognition of God's greatness, and of loving God alone. And, of course, purification is for him the Dionysian concept of self-emptying, putting all things into a cloud of forgetting. However, in his understanding of the relationship between love and knowledge of God, the English writer is much closer to Hugh of St. Victor. This, the very corner-stone of The Cloud is, as we have already seen, an element conspicuous by its absence in Dionysius' treatment of the mystical union. The connection between love and understanding is one which St. Augustine really developed and will accordingly be discussed in the next section. Suffice it to say that Hugh of St. Victor established it firmly within the mystical tradition, where it filled a gap in Dionysius, and that the author of The Cloud, among others, benefitted greatly from this contribution, which was so typical of Hugh's whole approach to theology and mysticism.

The other major legacy which Hugh handed on to later mystics was the differentiation between contemplative prayer in

this life, and the perfect vision of God in the next. Above is raised the question of whether, for Dionysius, there is anything beyond the darkness in which the soul first experienced God, or whether this is indeed the full knowledge, with no indication that it is unattainable in this life. The safe and orthodox Hugh, on the other hand, must make it clear that no true fulfillment can be reached on earth, all that is granted here is a foretaste of what will come 'primitas quasdam porrigit suae delectionis, non plenitudinem exhibit perfectae sapientatis'.⁴⁹ This point is hammered home with great frequency by the equally orthodox author of The Cloud.⁵⁰

There are major differences between Hugh of St. Victor and The Cloud. The via negativa which is the basis for the later writer's mystical ascent is totally foreign to Hugh's approach, which throughout, moves from the world of matter to the world of spirit. For the author of The Cloud, union with God is a natural progression from contemplative prayer, in a way that it is not for Hugh; the author of The Cloud is a much more direct heir to Dionysius than Hugh ever was. But Hugh had paved the way for the English author, for he brought Dionysius into the arena of orthodox theology, and the gentler approach he brought to mysticism, which caused him to emphasise: 'Non enim tam statum quam propositum respicit, nec quid sis, sed quid esse velis, attendit'⁵¹ is loudly echoed in The Cloud: 'For not what thou arte, ne what thou hast ben, beholdeth God with his merciful'ighe, bot that that thou woldest be.'⁵² If the mystical doctrine Hugh evolved was not satisfactory to the

fourteenth century writer, in not going far enough, nevertheless the Victorine had made a very great contribution to the tradition of The Cloud, in showing how orthodox Augustinian theology could blend with and add to the notion of a mystical union with God, as envisaged by Dionysius. It was left to his follower at St. Victor, Richard, to move further towards the Dionysian mysticism, and thus complement Hugh's work.

Richard of St. Victor is traditionally regarded as a major influence on The Cloud, in the same league as Dionysius. Yet Clare Kirchberger states that it is easy to over-emphasise the influence of Richard in England, pointing out the differences between him and the author of The Cloud and saying that the latter was much more directly an heir of Dionysius than Richard.⁵³ This is true, but it must be reiterated that we will not find anywhere a work of which The Cloud was a carbon copy. If Hugh was important as bringing Dionysian mysticism within the scope of orthodoxy - more, adding to it by drawing on his Augustinian theology - then Richard was even more important to such as the author of The Cloud, for his acceptance of some of Dionysius' tenets was much more apparent than Hugh's. As Clare Kirchberger rightly points out, Richard's approach to the mystical issue was very different from that of the anonymous writer.⁵⁴ Like Hugh, Richard wrote as a speculative theologian, outlining a doctrine of contemplative prayer, whereas The Cloud was written by a mystic, explaining his mysticism in practical and helpful terms to another mystic. The two start at very different levels, Richard at the very beginning of a lengthy

contemplative process, where concern is with things of this world; the starting point of The Cloud is much higher up, concerned only with God and the completion or perfection of the spiritual life. This does not erect a permanent barrier between the two writers, however, but simply puts them in different corners of the same field, and it does not in any way debar the possibility of Richard being a major influence on the author of The Cloud.

Richard was heir to two traditions, Augustinian and Dionysian, and he managed to straddle two fences with surprising success; while holding as firmly to the via positiva, in the initial stages, as did Dionysius and later the author of The Cloud to the via negativa, he managed to develop the notion of the cloud of unknowing, using the specific phrase nubes ignorantiae, as later the author of The Cloud did in preference to Dionysius' 'darkness of unknowing'. In order to reach up to this cloud there must be a certain amount of preparation, and in his systematic treatment of contemplative theory Richard goes through six stages, four of which may be achieved by human effort, while the last two are entirely dependent on grace. Since these are the only areas The Cloud is concerned with, it is here that similarities arise. In accordance with Richard's use of the via positiva, reason has its part to play, right up until the birth of these final stages of contemplation; but here it must die, and with it all things and thoughts belonging to this world must be put away: 'He must never descend to earthly business or the care of outward things'.⁵⁵ Moses enters the

cloud when the human mind, absorbed by the intensity of the divine light, falls asleep in complete forgetfulness of itself.'⁵⁶ In this Richard shows himself well within the Dionysian tradition, and distinct from Hugh's emphasis on a virtuous life as the necessary preparation for contemplation, and his stance is that of the author of The Cloud. Richard recognises that this is hard work, at which the contemplative must labour long, but the Augustinian element is strong in his emphasis that one is enabled to do this only through the working of extraordinary grace. It is a special grace 'that a man may ... hold the world in contempt'.⁵⁷ This is also found in The Cloud: 'In this is alle the traueyle; for this is mans trauayle, with help of grace.'⁵⁸ A similar use of violent language when referring to this hard work is found in the two writers; Richard says there will be frequent blows and much hammering'.⁵⁹ In The Cloud the reader is advised to 'bete on this cloude & this darkness ... smite down al maner thought..⁶⁰

There is, however, a difference between Richard's description of the self-emptying process and its relation to contemplative prayer, and that which we find throughout the Cloud - corpus. In Richard there is but one cloud, in which earthly things are forgotten and divine things revealed: 'At one and the same time the human intellect is illumined with regard to divine things and darkened in respect of human things'.⁶¹ And even more explicitly he states that 'One and the same cloud ... illumined divine things and clouded over human things'.⁶² In The Cloud there can be no divine illumination in a mind not

already empty of all human thoughts, and Richard's one cloud has been developed into two, the cloud of forgetting and the cloud of unknowing: '& if ever thou shalt come to this cloude & wone & worche ther-in as I bid thee, thee byhoueth, as this cloude of vnknowyng is aboven thee, betwix thee & thi God, right so put a cloude of forghetyng bineth thee, betwix thee & alle the cretures that ever ben maad'.⁶³ The reason for this may be found in the later writer's stricter Dionysianism. He is not ready to leave quite as much to grace, in this area at least, as Richard, his notion of self-emptying is stronger than Richard's, perhaps in accord with his use of the via negativa. An interesting corollary of this is that while in Richard self-awareness is emphasised as a necessity before coming to contemplation (although, as we have seen, this too must be lost, it is not lost until the very last minute) in The Cloud the emphasis is on the need to destroy self-awareness.⁶⁴ The idea is the same, but the emphasis very different.

In their understanding of the vision towards which the self-emptying process will lead, Richard and the author of The Cloud are closer to each other than either is to Hugh. Dionysius did not seem to differentiate between a vision of God in this life, and one in the next; Hugh makes the distinction very clear. Richard and the anonymous writer, while staying well within the limits of orthodoxy which Hugh was concerned for, still go some way back towards Dionysius. Both are very emphatic that there can be no clear vision in this life,⁶⁵ and even use similar language in describing the foretastes we are

granted. But for both there is a natural and obvious progression from one to the other, the same thing is seen, but on earth it is seen through a mirror, afterwards it is seen clearly, as an unclouded vision. Their understanding of the heights to which mystical contemplation can reach is thus much higher than that of Hugh, although Richard is much more expansive on this than is the English writer; nowhere does the Victorine talk of the ineffability of the mystical experience. This stems from his philosophical stance, his use of the via positiva, and his belief in the powers of reason, which leads him to talk of the mystical experience, initially, in terms of knowledge, seeing, understanding. But ultimately, there is something beyond this, and Richard's adherence to the Dionysian tradition is evident, as the soul leaves everything behind, all seeing, and all knowing, and transcends itself and eventually 'cleaves to the Lord and is one spirit with him'.⁶⁶ Within the tradition of mystical writers Richard uses the analogy of the spiritual marriage to describe the mystical union with God.

Richard was thus a major contributor to a modified Dionysianism. There are many differences between the Victorine and the author of The Cloud, principally Richard's use of the via positiva, and all this implied; but we must not forget that in the end he found this unsatisfactory and abandoned it in favour of Dionysius' notion of union in unknowing, thus displaying a fundamental sympathy with the Dionysian outlook. This sympathy, coupled with his development of Dionysius, ensured that he was to become an important source for the author of The Cloud

The relationship between Meister Eckhart and The Cloud of Unknowing is one which is treated with some ambiguity. The Cloud is frequently categorised along with the Rhineland mystics, and rightly, as a classic example of Dionysian mysticism in the west, yet there is a reluctance to pursue the matter any further. External indicators indicate the unlikelihood of Meister Eckhart's being known by the English writer, the conclusion having been reached that there is no evidence that Eckhart's writings had reached England by the mid-fourteenth century.⁶⁷ This does not, however, preclude the possibility that the English writer had travelled to the continent and encountered the thought of Meister Eckhart on his home ground. The argument that common background explains many similarities is stronger in the case of The Cloud and Meister Eckhart than any other, excepting Walter Hilton, for they were near contemporaries in the same tradition, and the relationship between the two cannot be regarded in the same light as that between Richard of St. Victor and The Cloud, for it is a question of parallels rather than of source and developer. Nevertheless, it is a relationship worthy of study in this thesis, for it helps in our understanding of The Cloud to see the differences, as well as the similarities, between the English writer and the German, to see how far the two, with so much of their understanding of the mystical life in common, trod the same path, and where, for various reasons, they diverged. For the two are in no way carbon copies of each other, nor are the differences between them on minor points, rather some of

these are basic to the whole approach each has to mysticism. It may therefore be helpful to start our examination of the relationship between the two by looking at Meister Eckhart's general position, and considering how this compares with that of the English writer.

The first point we must note is that Meister Eckhart's approach is that of the philosopher first, and then the theologian, while the author of The Cloud is first and foremost a theologian, although his mystical theology is set firmly within the philosophical framework provided by Dionysius. For Meister Eckhart unity is paramount, it is the diversity of creatures alone which makes the world inadequate, repugnant. Where there is distinction, there can be no communion with God: 'Neither the One, nor being, nor God, nor rest, nor blessedness, nor satisfaction is to be found where distinctions are'.⁶⁸ The mystic's aim is to overcome these distinctions and achieve unity, and this is a natural and inevitable ongoing process: 'For its sake, all that nature tries to do is plunge on into that unity, into the Father-nature, so that it all may be one, the one Son, and outgrowing everything else, to subsist in his Fatherhood, or if this cannot be done, at least to look like his oneness'.⁶⁹ In Meister Eckhart's writing the neo-Platonic concept of the overcoming of unnatural distinctions in search of the original one-ness and the return to unity as the goal of all nature, far exceeds the vision of the individual soul attempting to achieve union with God - albeit a union once held and since lost, and the natural goal of man - which is the backbone of

The Cloud. Meister Eckhart's use of theological terms, although these are many, appears almost superfluous, for one can conceive of an Eckhartian mysticism without them; but this is not the case with The Cloud. Perhaps it is unfair to Meister Eckhart to suggest this; and certainly one would not wish to imply that he envisaged a God-less mysticism, but he chose to use neo-Platonic language and to emphasise the philosophical nature of the union of God and man in a way that sets him apart from other medieval mystics, even where they had exactly the same philosophical background, as did the author of The Cloud.

This distinction is perhaps responsible for another resounding difference between the two writers. Meister Eckhart, although firmly convinced of his own orthodoxy and horrified by the charges made against him, was nevertheless condemned posthumously as heretical; the author of The Cloud, highly conscious of the threat of heresy which could so easily overshadow the mystic, made constant and conscious effort to stay well within the limits of orthodoxy. His refusal to speak of the delights of union with God is undoubtedly due to his awareness of the ineffability of the experience, but it is also possible that there is an element of caution there too, for in this area in particular it is easy to go out with the bounds of acceptable imagery. Below we shall find instances where Meister Eckhart treads on dangerous ground, while the English writer keeps carefully to the path of orthodoxy. Notably, it was in his German writings that Meister Eckhart used potentially dangerous phrases; in his Latin works he was completely

orthodox. There are at least two possible explanations for this. By writing in German, he faced the problem of breaking new ground linguistically, struggling to express himself in a language inadequate to the task. This could easily lead to apparently dubious doctrine. Again, the people to whom he was trying to express himself were by and large relatively uneducated, not possessing the tools of scholastic method as Meister Eckhart himself did. Therefore, he was put in the position of having, occasionally, to call a spade a spade, when in fact the concept of a spade was something quite unknown to his addressees. The attempt to prove Meister Eckhart a heretic was done by lifting certain phrases and statements out of context, and therefore essentially misrepresenting him. Nevertheless, the phrases were there to be taken, as they were not in the works of the more cautious English writer.

Like Meister Eckhart the author of The Cloud wrote in the vernacular, and this in itself is an indication that the two belonged to a similar school of thought, for this was indeed breaking new ground. Both wrote as spiritual directors, but of a very different kind. Perhaps surprisingly, Meister Eckhart is much less systematic in his treatment of mysticism than is the author of The Cloud, who uses his philosophy and his theology to draw a complete picture of the mystical life, in both The Cloud and the Epistle of Privy Counsel. Simultaneously, the anonymous writer appears much more humane and understanding than Meister Eckhart; the mystical doctrine is such that it can easily appear

harsh and uncompromising, for all its emphasis on love, simply because of the demands it makes on the individual, and it is very debatable whether the Queen of Hungary might be at all comforted by the Book of Divine Comfort, with its advice: 'You may have lost a thousand dollars. Stop weeping over the thousand you lost, and, instead, thank God that he gave you a thousand to lose and let go, so that you might be exercised in patience and virtue and be worthy of life eternal - as many thousands of people are not'.⁷⁰ Meister Eckhart is really being no harsher than other mystical writers, yet his choice of words make him appear so, whereas The Cloud, while its teachings are equally strong and uncompromising, is on the whole stamped by an essential humanity and kindness which seems lacking in Meister Eckhart.

The pattern of similarity accompanied by alteration or deviation which we find in the general stance of Meister Eckhart and the author of The Cloud is continued throughout their expositions of the mystical life. There are areas of strong similarity, where the influences of the Rhineland school seems very plausible; there are other areas where there is some likeness, but a definite shift, by the English author, from Meister Eckhart's own stance; and there are also some places where the two seem to stand quite independent of each other, and where there can be no question of influence.

The first area where we find the two writers adopting a very similar approach is, of course, in their use of the via negativa, their inheritance from Dionysius. Meister Eckhart's

use of the via negativa is uncompromising. All attributes must be rejected completely when talking of God, and indeed in this he goes even further than Dionysius. While the latter is prepared to accept that some characteristics may be more properly applied to God than others, Meister Eckhart says that all such distinctions are obstacles: 'Fully to know this inner work of virtue, however, one must be estranged even from good, truth, or anything else which, in thought or by name, implies the light or shadow of distinction'.⁷¹ The author of The Cloud is not as extreme as this, but his insistence that it is God himself whom the mystic must seek, without being diverted by thoughts of his goodness and mercy, equals Meister Eckhart's single-mindedness: '& if it be cortesy & semely to sey, in this werk it profiteth litil or nought to think of the kyndenes of the worthines of God ... it is fer betyr to think upon the naked beyng of him, & to love him & preise him for him-self.'⁷²

As part and parcel of the adoption of the via negativa comes the concept of self-emptying, or in the analogy of The Cloud, the cloud of forgetting. Both writers expound this with equal vehemence. The mind must be emptied of all unnecessary thoughts and cares, concentrating solely on God. No prayer or reading, no uplifting sermon can help in this task, for 'You may be sure that perfect quiet and idleness is the best you can do. For, see, you cannot turn him from this condition to do anything, without harming it'.⁷³ No-one has room in his heart for God and other things: 'No cask holds two kinds of drink at the same time. If the cask is to hold wine, its water

must first be poured out, leaving the cask empty and clean. If you are to have divine joy, all your creatures must first be poured out or thrown out'.⁷⁴ For the anonymous writer, the cloud of forgetting is as important as the cloud of unknowing, in that without it, there can be no contemplation of God: '& if ever thou schalt come to this cloude & wone & worche ther-in as I bid thee ... right so put a cloude of forghetyng bineth thee, bitwix thee & alle the cretures that ever ben maad. Thee thinketh, paraenture, that thou arte ful fer fro God, forthi that this cloude of vnknowign is bitwix thee & thi God; bot sekirly, & it be wel conseyued, thou arte wel ferther fro hym when thou haste no cloude of forgheting bitwix thee & alle the creatures that ever ben maad.'⁷⁵

As part of the process of purification, both writers envisage loss of awareness of self, although with a slight difference. Meister Eckhart seems to associate self with self-will, or wilfullness, and this is the first thing that must be given up. 'Begin, therefore, first with self and forget yourself! If you do not first get away from self, then whatever else you get away from you will still find obstacles and restlessness ... Let everyone begin by denying self and in so doing he will have denied all else'.⁷⁶ In contrast to this airy dismissal of the problem we find in The Cloud a much more thoughtful consideration of the issue. Far from being possible at the very beginning, loss of self is depicted as the final and most difficult stage in the process of forgetting: 'For, & thou wilt besily set thee to the preof, thou schalt fynde, when thou

hast fergeten alle other creatures & alle theire werkes, ye, & therto alle thin owne werkes, that ther schal leve it after, bitwix thee & thi God, a nakid weting & a felyng of thin owne beyng: the whiche wetynge & felyng behouith alweys be distroied er the tyme be that thou fele sothfastly the perfeccyon of this werk'.⁷⁷ The anonymous writer appears much more aware of the pain this will cause, of the grief involved as one recognises one's own worthlessness and yearns to be free of it.

Both writers have a similar attitude to past sins in this process, namely that it is pointless to dwell on them, although for different reasons. In The Cloud it is seen as an unhelpful activity simply because it distracts the mind from total concentration on God.⁷⁸ Meister Eckhart's explanation is that all sinful acts are God's will, and one should not therefore wish them undone, for it is right that God's will should always be done.⁷⁹ He believes that the truest penitence is simply turning away from all that is not God: 'The best penitence, however, and the supremely profitable penance is to turn away, root and branch, from all that is not God and not divine, whether it be in one's self or in other creatures'.⁸⁰ This is very similar indeed to the attitude found in The Cloud, where perfect humility is not knowledge of one's own weakness, but awareness of God's great goodness and love.⁸¹

In Meister Eckhart's treatment of the process of purification there is an aspect which we find nothing of in The Cloud, and which seems to characterise one of the basic

differences between the two writers, and likewise something in The Cloud unmentioned by Meister Eckhart. In the latter, it is evident that, at a certain stage, something of a re-conversion to creatures seems to take place: 'Everything will taste like God, and reflect him'.⁸² Creatures themselves are still totally irrelevant, but the belief is that the mystic will be able to see through them to God, so that they will no longer be a hindrance in his search for God. Taken as a whole, as it should be, the idea is of course completely safe and in line with orthodoxy, but statements such as the one quoted, taken out of context, could easily give rise to charges of pantheism, and it is undoubtedly lack of regard for this danger that made Meister Eckhart so vulnerable to claims of heresy.

We remarked earlier on the humanity and understanding which is so strong a characteristic of the author of The Cloud, and this partly evinces itself in the very practical advice he gives his reader. While Meister Eckhart simply declares that all thoughts must be got rid of and the mind left pure and empty for God, the author of The Cloud suggests that this may be done more easily by concentration of the mind on one particular word which seems to sum up the naked intent of the mind to God alone.⁸³

There are certainly differences between the author of The Cloud and Meister Eckhart in their treatment of the purification necessary for mystical union. But they are both equally determined in their fundamental stance, that the way to God is the way of negation, and that nothing must be allowed to distract the contemplative from his concentration on God alone.

He is the goal of the mystic's life, and only he may satisfy them: '& he by himself with-uten moo, & none bot he, is sufficient at the fulle, & mochel more, to fulfille the wille & the desire of oure soule'.⁸⁴ In characteristic fashion Eckhart expresses this idea in philosophical terms: 'Essence alone satisfies'.⁸⁵ But he also draws on an Augustinian phrase to express perfectly the belief of the Dionysian tradition: 'Since the soul has the power to know all things, she never rests until she returns to the first image, in which all things are one, and there she rests, that is, in God'.⁸⁶

In their understanding of this rest, this union,⁸⁷ the two writers again display profound similarities, and distinct differences. Of the former, the most striking is clearly the image of knowledge of God in darkness and unknowing, coming through Dionysius from Gregory of Nyssa: 'Let it be called ignorance or want of knowledge, still it has more in it than all wisdom and knowledge'.⁸⁸ 'This ignorance does not come from lack of knowledge but rather it is from knowledge that one may achieve this ignorance'.⁸⁹ 'Bot the higher partye of contemplacion (as it may be had here) hongeth al holy in this derknes & in this cloude of vnknowing, with a louyng steryng & a blinde beholdyng vnto the nakid beyng of God him-self only'.⁹⁰ And to Meister Eckhart as to the author of The Cloud the union is to be had with the Triune God, not with an individual member of the Trinity, thoughts of whom must be abandoned in the end, although each helps the mystic along the way. Meister Eckhart makes clear his preference for talking of the Godhead: 'I

prefer to speak of the Godhead, from whence all our blessings flow'.⁹¹ 'The will cannot be content ... it does not want God as he is the Holy Spirit or as he is the Son ... the will wants something of higher degree, something better than God as he is nameable'.⁹² 'The spark is averse to creatures, and favorable only to pure God as he is in himself. It is not satisfied with the Father, nor the Son, nor the Holy Spirit, nor with all three persons together, as long as their several properties are preserved'.⁹³ This reads almost as a passage from The Cloud, although there is again in Meister Eckhart a philosophical emphasis on unity which we do not find in The Cloud. We could perhaps best describe this difference by saying that in Meister Eckhart the stress is on being One with God, whereas in The Cloud it is rather on being one with God.

Another characteristic difference between the two is the fact that, while the author of The Cloud remains faithful to his belief in the ineffability of the mystical experience, Meister Eckhart describes it with great beauty and vividness, using the analogy of the flame rushing upwards: 'Likeness and love hurry upward like flames, to bring the soul to its origin ... When physical fire kindles and burns wood to sparks, the wood absorbs the fire's nature and becomes like the pure fire that hangs immediately under heaven. (The burning wood) suddenly forgets and abandons its father and mother ... it does not wait for them, but hurrying up, it mounts to its true father in the sky'.⁹⁴ It is a debatable point whether The Cloud's silence or Meister Eckhart's vivid imagery is a truer indication of the transcendent nature of the union.

In a similar way, Meister Eckhart emphasises the growing likeness of the soul to God, and the ultimate completeness of their union in a way the more orthodox writer never would:

'Indeed, the soul, too, may be led so near to God by the body of our Lord that all the angels, not excepting the Cherubim and Seraphim, shall not see any difference. For where they touch God they touch the soul, and where they touch the soul, they touch God. There never was another such union (as between the soul and God) for the soul is nearer to God than it is to the body which makes us human ... one is changed into the other so that no creature could ever again detect a difference between them'.⁹⁵ Comparing this with The Cloud we see the latter standing firmly within the bounds of orthodoxy and the Augustinian tradition: 'Bynethe thi God thou arte: for whi thof al it may be seide in maner that in this tyme God & thou ben not two bot one in spirit ... nevertheless yif thou arte binethe hym. For whi he is God by kynde with-uten beginnyng; & thou that symtyme were nought in substaunce ... only bi his mercy with-uten thi desert arte maad a God in grace'.⁹⁶ Neither writer contradicts anything the other says. Behind each of these statements may lie precisely the same beliefs; but it is again a question of emphasis. Perhaps carelessly, Meister Eckhart emphasises the one-ness of God and man. Very cautiously, the author of The Cloud emphasises the ineradicable distinction between God and man, fusing the eastern explanation of this, namely the createdness of man, with the Augustinian emphasis on the power of grace. With this same caution, he

stresses that any vision of God to be had in this life is clouded, incomplete, and only in the next will a clear, perfect vision be had, a full knowledge of and union with God achieved. In contrast, Meister Eckhart does not mention this at all, either to affirm or deny, nor are there any real hints as to what his position was on this issue at all.

Turning from their understanding of God, and union, to their views on man, likeness and dissimilarity again appear. The influence of St. Augustine appears in the psychology both writers adopt. In their division of the soul into faculties, there is a slight difference; Meister Eckhart distinguishes six faculties or agents, the three lower being reason, irascibility, and desire, and the three higher memory, intelligence and will. In The Cloud we find five; the two lower are imagination and sensuality, the three higher mind, reason and will. These numerical and nominal differences are relatively unimportant in the scholastic age, the fundamental similarity is more significant, namely the primary importance of the will in the mystical life. Meister Eckhart actually appears to have two ideas about the will. The first, which is evident in the Talks of Instruction, speaks of the will in negative terms, as something which defies God's will, and must be overcome. Elsewhere, however, will is presented in more familiar terms, as the power which urges us towards God, and the relationship between love and will is made clear. 'The seat of love is in the will alone. To have more will is to have more love ... Thus love depends altogether on the will.'⁹⁷ The will is described

as the third of the highest agents of the soul, 'which, like a countenance, is always turned towards God in divine willing, and thus creates the love of God within itself'.⁹⁸ It is the will which determines whether men's acts are good or evil; for Meister Eckhart as for the author of The Cloud it is the desire to commit a sin which in fact constitutes the sin; rather than the act itself: 'The impulse to sin is not sin but to consent to sin, to give way to anger, is indeed sin'.⁹⁹ Conversely, the good man, that is, the one who always desires God's will; will be unable to commit anything but a good act: 'The most trivial deed or function in such a person is more profitable and fruitful to himself and all men, and pleases God better, than all other human practices put together'.¹⁰⁰ In words very like those of The Cloud, Meister Eckhart declares that 'virtue, like vice, is a matter of the will'.¹⁰¹ The importance of will in The Cloud is discussed below, for it is part of the inheritance from St. Augustine; here we will only say that the anonymous writer and Meister Eckhart share a strong faith in man's ability to choose God, which is complemented by the belief that this is the highest achievement of the human will, the only contribution it can make to the eventual union.¹⁰²

Elsewhere in their understanding of man, however, the two display very different beliefs. One of Meister Eckhart's most important ideas is that of the Funklein; the belief that there is in all men a something which is pure and uncreated is the very corner stone of his mysticism for it is precisely this that enables the soul to return to God. It is variously described,

as the core of the soul, as the divine seed, but the image of the spark or Funklein flying upwards from the fire to its true father is the one which endures. This was one of Meister Eckhart's most dangerous doctrines, and one which was to help lead to his downfall; and yet it is a logical outcome of his following of the Eastern tradition in the belief that it is not sin, but createdness, which separates men from God. Anything created and corruptible may not come into contact with the uncreated being, and therefore to make union with God possible there must be something uncreated and incorruptible at the core of the created and corruptible man. Discussing this, Meister Eckhart uses the same simile of the sculptor which we found earlier in Dionysius.¹⁰³

This idea is not to be found in The Cloud. Instead, he uses the eternal distinction between the created and the uncreated as a guarantee that, even in their mystical union, man and God remain in essence two, while one in spirit. To this he adds the doctrine of original sin to explain why man fell from this state to his present one: '& if thou were reformed bi grace to the first state of mans soule, as it was bfore sinne, than thou schuldest evermore, bi help of that grace, be lorde of that stering or of thoo sterynges; so that none ede forby, bot alle thei schulde streche in-to the souerin desirable & into the heighest wilnable thing, the whiche is God'.¹⁰⁴ The traditional imago dei is all the author will allow as affinity between the soul and God: 'For he is even mete to our soule by mesuring of his Godheed; & oure soule even mete unto him bi worthiness of

oure creacion to his ymage & to his liknes'.¹⁰⁵ In this way, the English writer steers well clear of the heretical taint. However, the strictly philosophical approach which Meister Eckhart adopts produces a logical coherence, as well as an aesthetically pleasing balance, more satisfactory than anything we find in the more orthodox writer. At the same time, we must recognise the unfairness of the charges made against Meister Eckhart, for at the core of his teaching is a belief in the distinction between God and man far stronger than any which originates in the idea of original sin. It was impossible for him to remain faithful to this, retain the possibility of a complete, neo-Platonic union, and remain safely within the limits of strict orthodoxy.

As a result of their differences on this point, the place of grace is another area of contrasting attitudes. Grace is all-important in The Cloud, although as we will see the author had problems reconciling traditional Augustinian teaching on grace with inclinations towards something more semi-Pelagian. Meister Eckhart had no such difficulties, for him the mystic's search for God is prompted by the natural longing of all things to return to their source. He does not reject traditional teaching, although he comes close to denial of prevenient grace when he says 'It is not possible for God to do his will in every heart, for even though he is almighty, he cannot act except where he finds preparations made ...'.¹⁰⁶ although he immediately slides into a Cloud-like ambiguity by adding 'or he makes them himself'.¹⁰⁷ On the whole, however, Meister

Eckhart's changes are more subtle, although not contrived. To some extent his understanding is traditional: 'Grace comes only with the Holy Spirit. It carries the Holy Spirit on its back ... It can only flow out of God and then only immediately. The function of grace is to transform and reconvey (the soul) to God. Grace makes the soul godlike'.¹⁰⁸ However, it does seem that he envisages grace more in the terms of the natural force which compels things back to the origin, thus fusing the theological notion with the philosophical: 'God, the core of the soul, and grace belong together'.¹⁰⁹ 'Grace does no work, for its work is to come to be. It flows out of the essence of God, into the essence of the soul but not into the soul's agents'.¹¹⁰ He does not treat the notion of grace in anything like the depth of the author of The Cloud, and when he does mention it his references are uncontroversial, and there is nothing of the tension we find in The Cloud. Meister Eckhart contrives to fit his idea of grace into his scheme most naturally. It is not a major issue for him as it is for the anonymous writer; and again we have the impression that the philosophical framework is the important one, and the theological language rather less essential to the plot.

The relationship between love, intellect, and the union with God is another area where there is a considerable gulf between Meister Eckhart and The Cloud, at least on the surface. In The Cloud it is stated repeatedly that love is the foundation of the mystical life, and the belief that it is only by whole-hearted and uncompromising love of God that the mystic

seeks and finds God is echoed on every page. The use of the intellect in this search is rejected, although the mystical understanding of love is certainly intellectual as opposed to emotional, and there is no doubt that the intellect had its part to play in the earlier stages of the journey to God: 'For whi love may reche to God in this liif, bot not knowing'¹¹¹ '& therefore lift up thin heart with a blynde steryng of love'.¹¹² In Meister Eckhart there is a degree of ambiguity on this point, and he is not so whole-hearted in his advocacy of love as the one way to God - although it may be that, in the end, what he describes is not very far from The Cloud's definition of love. In places, it appears that it is certainly our love for God which leads to union with him: 'Likeness and love hurry upward like Flames, to bring the soul to its origin'.¹¹³ Conversely, lack of love leads to continued separation: 'That we are not able to see God is due to the faintness of desire and the throng of things'.¹¹⁴ Elsewhere, Meister Eckhart shows himself to have a rather different attitude from that found in The Cloud. He seems almost to suggest that love is the outcome of putting things in their correct perspective, rather than the reason for doing so: 'It is God's nature to be without a nature. To think of his goodness, or wisdom, or power to hide the essence of him ... Even one such single thought or consideration will cover it up. Such is the divine order of things, and when God finds this order in a soul he begets his Son, and the soul bursts into light with all its energy and from that energy, that light, there leaps a flame. That is love, and the soul, with all its

energy, has penetrated to the divine order'.¹¹⁵ In The Cloud, refusal to be diverted by meditation upon God or his attributes is only made possible by whole-hearted concentration on God himself in love. Elsewhere, Meister Eckhart seems even further from the thought of The Cloud, in his advocacy of Abgeschiedenheit, disinterest, over and above love:

'Nevertheless, I put disinterest higher than love'.¹¹⁶

Disinterest is best of all, for by it the soul is unified, knowledge is made pure, the heart is kindled, the spirit awakened, the desires quickened, the virtues enhanced.

Disinterest brings knowledge of God; cut off from the creature, the soul unites with God'.¹¹⁷ Disinterest in Meister Eckhart is the same as the cloud of forgetting in The Cloud, but for the latter love is the sine qua non, for only love makes it possible. Nevertheless, it is a love which necessarily includes Meister Eckhart's disinterest, and we may ask if the latter really conceived of Abgeschiedenheit without love, and if therefore the two are closer in reality than in appearance.

Not surprisingly, the philosopher in Meister Eckhart allows the intellect a much greater role in the union with God than does the author of The Cloud, for whom love takes the place of all else. Meister Eckhart declares that 'knowledge and intellect unite the soul to God',¹¹⁸ and elsewhere states that 'knowledge is better than love, but the two together are better than one of them, for knowledge really contains love'.¹¹⁹ If we reverse this statement we find something more akin to the teaching of The Cloud, where love is an all-encompassing notion

and love of God leads eventually to complete knowledge and understanding: 'Bot sith alle resonable creatures, aungel & man, hath in hem, ilch-one by hem-self, o principal worching might, the whiche is clepid a louyng might: of the whiche two mightes, to the first, the whiche is a knowyng might, God, that is the maker of hem, is evermore incomprehensible, & to the secound, the whiche is the louyng myght, in ilch one diversly he is al comprehensible at the fulle'.¹²⁰ A synthesis of love and knowledge is thus hinted at, which is stated much more openly by Meister Eckhart: 'Of what does this true possession of God consist, when one really has him? It depends on the heart and an inner, intellectual return to God ...'.¹²¹ The author of The Cloud fights shy of the word 'intellect', or 'intellectual', but again it may be that it is the cautious theologian in him which prompts this. His emphasis is on the power of love, set alight by grace, while Meister Eckhart's appears to be on the intellect but ultimately, perhaps, the two are closer to each other than their language makes them appear.

It is clear that Meister Eckhart and the author of The Cloud adopt very different stances on many issues; but this should not distract us from the fact that they are without doubt members of the same family, for their very real similarities pertain to the central aspects of their mysticism as well as to more peripheral points. Their vision of the contemplative life as being acted out within the context of traditional church life,¹²² their sceptical attitude to raptures, their teaching on discretion and insistence that the contemplative remove himself

from the cares of the world, as well as their fierce adherence to the via negativa and vision of union with God in darkness and silence, show how close they were on both major and minor points. It can never be proved that Meister Eckhart was known by the author of The Cloud; even if he was, he could hardly have been an influence in the manner of an established authority. But the two are so close, both in ideas and in time, that the German master cannot be ignored by those seriously wishing to understand The Cloud and its background.

In this section we have seen how some of the major concepts in the mysticism of The Cloud were developed as the Dionysian tradition, a tradition which, despite its name, has roots which go far beyond the Syrian writer. In Gregory of Nyssa is seen the use of the via negativa, the idea of purification, of silent prayer and knowledge of God in darkness and unknowing. Dionysius developed these, and other notions, to create a more complete concept of union with God, and a philosophical framework for later mystics who followed the apophatic way. Among the Victorines we find something of a recantation of this, a more cautious type of mysticism which, none-the-less, and particularly in Richard, owes its ultimate fulfillment to Dionysianism. Meister Eckhart was a direct heir to unmodified Dionysianism, although he created a mysticism of his own, in particular through his concepts of the birth of the eternal word in the soul, and the uncreated spark in man. The author of The Cloud inherited all these ideas, as well as others, from the Dionysian tradition, and showed himself faithful throughout to

the apophatic way. But at the same time he owed much to the tradition which is frequently juxtaposed to the Dionysian, although the differences between the two, both based as they are on neo-Platonism, are too easily exaggerated. There is not an Augustinian mysticism in the way that there is a Dionysian; but there are strong spiritual elements which the author of The Cloud used, and this, along with his adherence to orthodox Augustinian theology, ensured that he stands in history as the heir to two traditions.

THE INFLUENCES: THE AUGUSTINIAN TRADITION

It was not simply the great authority and stature of St. Augustine which ensured his influence on the author of The Cloud, but also the fact that his attitude and interests were congenial to those of the English writer; he was an orthodox theologian whose ideas were firmly grounded in neo-Platonism, and who had a strongly spiritual slant. These points all indicate a great deal of common ground between the two writers. As in Gregory of Nyssa, so in St. Augustine there is not a mystical union as understood in the Middle Ages; yet his pre-occupation with the notion of the perfection of the human soul, so beautifully expressed in the Confessions 'our heart is restless, until it repose in thee',¹²³ indicates that his theology was worked out in a context not inimical to the mystical ideal, although it is unthinkable that Augustine would ever lessen the gap between man and God as even the most cautious mystic did. But while the author the The Cloud was much more of a mystic than St. Augustine, who was not a mystic at all, he was much more of a theologian than Dionysius. Therefore, while the philosophical framework of his mysticism was Dionysian, the hand of St. Augustine is to be seen clearly in his theology. Nowhere is the choice of St. Augustine and the Augustinian tradition, rather than the Eastern tradition, by the author of The Cloud, more clearly seen than in his preference for the Being of God rather than his Goodness as the first attribute of the Divine. This notion, which of course had strong scriptural backing, could

equally trace its roots to Platonism, for in a series of moves the Good became identified, in neo-Platonism, as the Divine, and the source of all being, above all attributes. St. Augustine attached himself to this notion of being, and through his influence the essence, rather than the existence of God became the starting point of theology over the next eight hundred years. In his article 'Sources and Theology in The Cloud of Unknowing' J.P.H. Clark traces the use of the Augustinian notion of the Being of God as the first name of God from its inception to St. Bonaventura and St. Thomas Aquinas and shows how the author of The Cloud allies himself to this, the neo-Platonic tradition, rather than the purely Platonic which, as J.P.H. Clark points out, Dionysius follows, in the Divine Names at least.¹²⁴ In the Epistle of Privy Counsel this is particularly marked, but it is also evident throughout The Cloud that God is to be understood as simple naked Being, the source of all being, and in response the mystic must strip himself of all qualities, become aware only of his own being, and eventually lose this also, so that he may see the True Being itself. To be sidetracked by consideration of God's attributes is a false step, all that matters is that he is. Thus in such passages as '& loke that nothing leve in thi worching mynde bot a nakid entent streching into God, not clothid in any specyal thought of God in hym-self, how he is in him-self or in any of his werkes, bot only that he is as he is ... This nakid entent, freely fastenid & groundid in verrey beleue schal be nought elles to thi thought & to thi felying bot a nakid thought & a blynde feling of thin owne beyng: as if thou seidist thus vnto God with-inne in thi menyng, 'That at I am Lorde, I offre vnto thee withoutyn any lokyng to eny qualite of thi beyng,

bot only that thou arte as thou arte, with-uten any more',¹²⁵ the author indicates his adoption of the Augustinian stance, typified in St. Augustine's citation of Exodus: 'And thou criedst to me from afar; 'Yea verily, I am that I am'.¹²⁶ However, elsewhere in his doctrine of God the author of The Cloud shows his independence of St. Augustine and returns to his Dionysian inheritance, in his outright rejection of the via positiva in favour of the via negativa. It could be argued that in this he is more consistent than either St. Augustine or Dionysius, for certainly it is a logical outcome of his insistence that God be seen as simple Being, and his various creatures and acts in creation be ignored, at a certain point, that the author should reject the possibility of reaching God by ascent from creation. Thus we see the English writer's successful use of two traditions, fusing the Dionysian with the Augustinian, and remaining neo-Platonic throughout.

Moving from the concept of God to the concept of Trinity, it is again apparent how St. Augustine's long arm stretched down to the medieval mystic, for his teaching on the Trinity was one of St. Augustine's most important contributions to Western theology. In the split between East and West on this issue, the followers of the Eastern way tended towards pluralism, emphasising initially the distinctions between the persons of the Trinity, then seeking their unity. This could lead only too easily to binitarianism and the subordination of the Holy Spirit. In the West, the starting-point was the unity of the Godhead, but this too could lead to unsatisfactory notions such as Modalism. St. Augustine, of course, began with the essential unity of the

Trinity, the Godhead itself, and the view that, in the activities of the Trinity, all three persons act equally, since they are possessed of one will, yet it is appropriate to attribute to each member certain roles. In this way he laid the foundations for the view that opera ad extra ... sunt indivisa, and gave to Western theology the hallmark of its Trinitarian doctrine. Of a less fundamental nature, but nevertheless to prove extremely useful was St. Augustine's contribution to the search for appropriate analogies for the Trinity. He likened the Trinity and the three persons within it to the human soul and its faculties of mind, reason and will, and this analogy was to be used and developed throughout the Middle Ages. The author of The Cloud followed St. Augustine and the Augustinian way in that he began with the One, the Divine Essence, and belief in the involvement of all the members of the Trinity in activities which are attributed to any one of them.¹²⁷ However, while he was indebted to St. Augustine for his psychology, and used the triadic division of man's soul, he did not extend this use to the Trinitarian analogy which was developed from it; indeed he shows no taste for any analogies for the Trinity.

Like his understanding of the Trinity, St. Augustine's view of man was to have a profound influence on the development of Western thought. Unlike the East, the West did not hold the view that God was essentially and from the outset unreachable by man. Rather, the immense gulf between the two was attributed to original sin. Unlike Fulgentius, St. Augustine did not go so far as to state that the child who dies in the womb is so tainted by

original sin that it goes straight to hell; but this was a natural conclusion to St. Augustine's line of thought.¹²⁸ He stressed both the unavoidability of original sin, and its effects on man's status and activities, thus his whole view of man is dominated by his understanding of sin.¹²⁹ As we will see below, in The Cloud, too, original sin is a fundamental issue, unavoidable and ineradicable as for St. Augustine, although there is no hint of how the author thought original sin is transmitted. Again, like St. Augustine, sin has as much to do with the state of mind as with the act: 'But since my pleasure was not in those pears, it was in the offence itself, which the company of fellow-sinners occasioned'.¹³⁰ 'But if it so be that this likyng or gruching fastnyng in thi fleschly herte & theires be suffred so longe to abide vnreproued, that than at the last it is fastnid to the goostly herte (that is to sey the wile) with a ful consent: than it is deedly synne'.¹³¹ The distinction between mortal and venial sin, which has its origins in St. Augustine, is also found in The Cloud.¹³²

There are also, however, marked differences between St. Augustine's attitude to sin and sins, and those found in The Cloud. For the former, it was evidently a very positive and helpful act to revel in one's past sins, and he indulges in this himself with great delight: 'I will now call to mind my past foulness and the carnal corruptions of my soul: not because I love them, but that I may love Thee, O my God. For love of Thy love I do it; reviewing my most wicked ways in the very bitterness of my remembrance, that Thou mayst grow sweet unto

me;'¹³³ In The Cloud this sort of activity is of very limited value, however; for the contemplative, its effects are purely negative, for it distracts the mind from God. It may have its place in the meditative stage, but even here meditation on man, even one's own wretchedness, comes a poor second to meditation on God. This is perhaps a concomitant of, on the one hand, The Cloud's emphasis on the positive, on looking forward, and, on the other, St. Augustine's rather more backward-looking approach.

There is nothing in The Cloud of St. Augustine's understanding of evil as non-being: 'For hence I believed Evil also to be some such kind of substance, and to have its own foul, and hideous bulk ... And because a piety, such as it was, constrained me to believe, that the good God never created any evil nature, I conceived two masses, contrary to one another, both unbounded, but the evil narrower, the good more expansive. And from this pestilent beginning, the other sacrilegious conceits followed on me'.¹³⁴ 'But if they be deprived of all good, they shall cease to be.'¹³⁵ Although this view fitted in neatly with St. Augustine's neo-Platonism, it was prompted by his dalliance with Manicheism. Despite the strength of this type of heresy in the Middle Ages, as Catharism, it posed no threat to the English writer, which is interesting, as he is on the whole very quick to condemn anything in the least bit heretical. Nevertheless, in this instance he ignores the danger of the extreme and takes the popular stance, regarding evil as a very 'real force, always juxtaposed to good: 'For I telle thee trewly that the devil hath his contemplatyves, as God hath his.'¹³⁶

'For, & it were so that iche iuel thought and stering to sinne were the werk & the speche of none other spirite bot only of man's owe spirite, than it wolde folow bi that that mans owne spirite were a feend, the whiche is apertly fals and dampnable woodnes. For thof al it be so that a soule may, bi freelte and custom of sinnyng, falle into so moche wrechidnes that it takith on itself bi bondage of sinne the office of the devil, stering itself to sinne ever more & more withoutyn any sogestion of any other spirite, as it is seide before, yit it is not therfore a devel in kynde. Bot it is a devel in office and may be clepid devely¹³⁷

In his representation of original sin, sins, and evil, the author of The Cloud shows both adherence to and independence from St. Augustine; and a similar position is taken as regards man's free will and the role of grace. For St. Augustine grace was both prevenient and irresistible. On his own man can do nothing, he may only respond to God's call, and even the response is prompted by God, it is not a free choice: 'I call Thee into my soul, which, by the longing Thyself inspirest into her, Thou preparest for Thee.'¹³⁸ The precedent for this was set in the Incarnation, and Christ continues to play the mediating role in the God-man relationship - to the ultimate exclusion of a true mystical union. The author of The Cloud esteemed grace very highly, as highly as St. Augustine did, and to a certain extent wished to follow the Augustinian line. But, as is discussed at greater length below, a certain tension appears in his treatment of grace, he seems torn between Augustinian prevenient grace and

a semi-Pelagian approach which falls off his tongue more naturally, and fits in better with his notions of man and free will.

St. Augustine paid lip service to the idea of free will, and again this was determined by his reaction against his earlier beliefs; while in theory he adhered to the notion of free will, he claimed that left to itself the will always chooses evil, so again man cannot choose God unless God has already chosen him, and it is in this perversion of the will that the root of evil lies: 'And I strained to perceive what I now heard, that free will was the cause of our doing ill'.¹³⁹ Once more the author of The Cloud stops short of St. Augustine's rather negative and harsh view of man, for, while stating clearly that original sin affected the will, the effect was that men may now choose evil; prior to the Fall they could only choose good, so, speaking precisely, the will is really more free after the Fall than before. Far from believing that left to themselves men must choose evil, the author states that they are free to make a response to God's offer of grace.¹⁴⁰

However, while St. Augustine may have paid only lip-service to the idea of a free will, this criticism cannot be levied at his treatment of the will. To St. Augustine, the will was of primary importance in the religious life, and, as developed in the Middle Ages, especially by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, this notion was to make a major contribution to mystical doctrine. As we have seen, in the Dionysian account of the soul's journey towards union, the motivating force behind the impulse to God

seemed to be missing. While St. Augustine did not have any concept of the true mystical union, he did supply this missing element in the context of the 'ordinary' movement of the soul to God, in this way laying the foundations for the fulfillment of the idea of mystical union.

The idea of the primacy of the will has its background in St. Augustine's analysis of the soul, as consisting of the different faculties of mind, reason, will. This was to become as much a part of medieval thought as his teaching on original sin, and it is not surprising to find it in The Cloud, discussed at some length.¹⁴¹ The will is the dominant power of the human soul, hence the perversion caused by original sin has the gravest consequences. But conversely when the grace of God enables the individual to choose good, the effect is equally positive, and love of God compels the will towards him, thus the connection between love and will is made, and this, for the development of mystical doctrine, was the important point. Love becomes the pivotal point of the Christian life, and Richard of St. Victor, St. Bernard, and The Cloud are all foreshadowed in places by St. Augustine: 'Let Thy works praise Thee, that we may love Thee; and let us love Thee, that Thy works may praise Thee,'¹⁴² 'it is a brief but true definition of virtue to say, it is the order of love'.¹⁴³ 'Up, Lord, and do; stir us up, and recall us; kindle and draw us; inflame, grow sweet unto us; let us now love, let us run.'¹⁴⁴ From this emphasis on loving God comes St. Augustine's famous dictum 'Love, and do what you will.'¹⁴⁵, and it is feasible that the concept of discretion, so important in Richard of St. Victor, and then in The Cloud, had its roots in this

attitude, if not in this precise formulation of the idea. More than this cannot be said; but it is certain, at least, that through his emphasis on loving God, St. Augustine laid important foundations for what was to be so effectively developed almost a thousand years later, to the great enrichment of the mystical tradition, although, as is discussed below, there was still a gap between St. Augustine and the idea that unum necesse est, for as well as love, he wished to retain the use of man's reason all along the way.

St. Augustine did, however, have a strong belief in the idea of the perfection of the human soul, the process of deification, with the ultimate goal of the vision of God, and in this journey, as we saw in Gregory of Nyssa, the spiritual man follows a similar pattern to the contemplative man as described by later writers. Despite his positive attitude to creation (which we also find, although less markedly, in The Cloud) St. Augustine stresses that at a certain point the things of this world must be forgotten: 'For behold, O Lord, our God, our Creator, when our affections have been restrained from the love of the world..' ¹⁴⁶ He also has a strong concept of purification: 'Yet neither have I forgotten, nor will I pass over the severity of Thy scourge, and the wonderful swiftness of Thy mercy'. ¹⁴⁷ However, his emphasis on the darker side of the spiritual's life, the pain and darkness which are a part of the process of coming to know God, seems closer to his desire to revel in his past sins, as already mentioned, than to the profound despair associated with The Cloud ¹⁴⁸ and, to a greater extent, St. John of The Cross.

St. Augustine, like earlier and later spiritual and mystical writers, acknowledges the pull of a life apart from the world:

'And many of us friends conferring about, and debating the turbulent turmoils of human life, had debated and now almost resolved on living apart from business and the bustle of men.'¹⁴⁹ What they planned was not, strictly speaking, a solitary life but a communal one among friends of like disposition, and for practical reasons the plans fell apart, displaying a lack of fidelity to the ideal which true anchorites and mystics would have found abhorrent.

Therefore, it rapidly becomes clear, when we turn from theology to the details of spiritual teaching, that likenesses between St. Augustine and The Cloud are of a fairly superficial nature only, and do not refer to their fundamental understanding of spirituality; and this is nowhere as apparent as in their two views of the goal of the Christian life, although their language when referring to this is in places very similar indeed. Like the author of The Cloud, St. Augustine sees the whole of life as a journey towards God, and he expresses this view in neo-Platonic terms. Man is diffused by sin, and the desire to sin, and the search for God is the search for unity of self, body, soul, will.¹⁵⁰ Using imagery which was to become a hall-mark of the mystics, he describes the journey of the soul up towards God: 'We are inflamed, by Thy Gift we are kindled; and are carried upwards; we grow inwardly with Thy fire, with Thy good fire, and we go;'¹⁵¹ God is the ultimate goal, in whom rest and peace are to be found: 'I cannot measure so as to know, how much love there

yet lacketh to me, ere my life may run into Thy embracements, not turn away, until it be hidden in the hidden place of Thy Presence'.¹⁵² Elsewhere, talk of a vision, not to be had in this life, and couched in the Pauline imagery later to be so beloved by mystics, may easily lead to further confusion: 'And truly, now we see through a glass darkly, not face to face as yet ... until my darkness be made as the noon-day in Thy countenance'.¹⁵³ This is not, however, the Beatific Vision, and nowhere does St. Augustine speak of a union with God. Rather, St. Augustine's goal is a two-fold one; first of all, the search is for God, for unity of self, but it is also the search for illumination, and this is a very different thing from mystical union, for knowledge, not union in love, is its achievement, and the imagery from I Corinthians, 13, which is elsewhere used in the context of the mystical union, is used by St. Augustine in the context of illumination and complete knowledge: 'that intellectual Heaven, whose Intelligences know all at once, not in part, not darkly, not through a glass, but as a whole, in manifestation, face to face'.¹⁵⁴ Knowledge forms a part of the Beatific Vision, the true knowledge of God which includes knowledge of all other things, but it is a knowledge which surpasses the use of reason, and St. Augustine wished to retain the use of reason, all along the way. By the time we come to The Cloud the connotations have changed slightly; for the medieval writer as for St. Augustine reason and love are complementary, but whereas for St. Augustine the relationship is parallel, in The Cloud a 'Thomist' stance is adopted, and reason stops when love takes over completely. St.

Augustine's development of the idea of illumination, the christianisation of Platonic language was certainly very influential in the Middle Ages; there is a trace of it in the Epistle of Prayer: 'I say that a soule, touched in affeccioun bi the sensible presence of God as he is in hymself & in a parfite soule, & illumind in the reson by the clere beme of everlastyng light, the whiche is God ...',¹⁵⁵ It is not, however, an important concept in the Cloud corpus, as it is in, for example, Richard of St. Victor and St. Bonaventura, the author preferring instead to emphasise the importance of love and redundancy of reason at the contemplative stage. It did not contribute anything to the development of mystical doctrine, for while in speaking of it St. Augustine comes closer than he does anywhere else to the language of the mystics, it is not in any sense a mystical notion, it pertains only to knowledge and not to being. Thus, whatever his contributions to the earlier stages, at this ultimate point the mystics, and the author of The Cloud, must part company with St. Augustine.

It must be said that St. Augustine had a considerable degree of influence on the author of The Cloud, simply because he was a major contributor to the orthodox theology which the author of The Cloud followed. Thus it is not perhaps St. Augustine himself we find so much as medieval Augustinianism, and even then in places the author feels free to make his own modifications, certainly traces of Thomism are evident also. Another major importance of St. Augustine for the author of The Cloud was in showing how neo-Platonism could be fused with orthodox theology

and a strongly spiritual slant. This was of course a strong feature of medieval thought, and of many of the sources of The Cloud, but St. Augustine had paved the way. Ultimately, there was a considerable gap between the fourth century writer and the medieval, because St. Augustine could never abandon the use of reason for knowledge in unknowing, and because his very low evaluation of man was always dominant and he could not conceive of a true union between God and man. The development of scholastic argument meant the author of The Cloud could have union without loss of distinctions, he could have his cake and eat it as St. Augustine could not. Nevertheless, St. Augustine was very important for the foundations of The Cloud; he provided the more obviously theological content for the philosophical framework of Dionysius, and he also sowed seeds which his followers would nurture and tend and in turn pass on to such as the author of The Cloud; the Victorines, already important to the author because of their development of Dionysian ideas, were to provide a source of Augustinian concepts also.

There are two main areas where an idea which had its roots in St. Augustine was developed by the Victorines, and then found useful by the author of The Cloud, although there are also several other areas where likenesses between the two are apparent, but where it is less convincing that the Victorines were the seminal authority.

The first of the two major areas we will look at is the concept of discretion. It has been suggested earlier that this

might have developed from St. Augustine's 'Love, and do what you will'. In Richard of St. Victor this passed from a mere hint to a fully worked out teaching, and does not merely mean knowing how to behave, but affects one's whole existence, and enables contemplation. In Richard's allegorical treatment of the family of Jacob, Joseph is discretion, born long after fear, hope, joy, love of God, and long before contemplation. It is the child of reason, and is the means by which the soul is brought to self-knowledge, the stage directly before the vision of God; it is the ascent of the mountain whose summit is the knowledge of God. It is thus the product of much struggle and effort: 'We do not learn perfection of discretion without much practice and long experience ... We know much about discretion from reading and hearing, and also from the inborn judgement of our reason, but only the teaching of experience will fully instruct us'.¹⁵⁶ It is something to be worked at and for, for Joseph's demands are great, 'his counsel unbearable'.¹⁵⁷ However, there can be no short-cutting the effort which Joseph demands if one is to come to contemplation for discretion is an integral part of the contemplative process. Two main characteristics seem to emerge from Richard's understanding of discretion. First, he views it as an earthly thing, worked for and achieved, not given freely by God. Second, it is an essential and long-lasting part of life, not an extra earned by the hard-working, but something without which one cannot see God.

In The Cloud discretion is equally important as it pertains to the more minor details of the contemplative's life: 'For in

alle thin other doynges thou schalt have discrecion, as in etyng & in drynkyng, & in slepyng, & in kepyng of thi body fro outrageous colde or hete, & in longe preying or redyng, or in comounyng in speche with thin even Crysten. In alle thees schalt thou kepe discrecion, that thei be nouthur to mouchel ne to lityl'.¹⁵⁸ But when it comes to loving God, discretion must be abandoned: 'Bot in this werk schalt thou holde no mesure; for I wolde that thou schuldest never seese of this werk the whiles thou leuyst'.¹⁵⁹ Discretion is, indeed, deemed important enough to have a whole work devoted to the concept, in which is explained the danger of following one's own inclinations.¹⁶⁰ There is, however, a slight ambivalence in the author's rendering of the concept. On the one hand, it is not, as for Richard, something earned by experience and effort, but a gift which comes through grace: 'For whi, for to speke & for to be stille, for to ete & for to fast, & for to be only and for to be in companie ever whan we wile, mow we have bi kinde; bot for to kun do alle theese, we may not bot bi grace'.¹⁶¹ All these stirrings should be followed up not for the sake of self, but of God: 'It is God for whom thou schuldest be stille, if thou schuldest be styлле; and for whom thou schuldest speke, if thou schuldest speke..'.¹⁶² Thus it is implied that men will want to follow the dictates of discretion, and there is nothing of Richard's unbearable counsel. Yet simultaneously discretion is depicted as almost intuitive, and instinctive knowledge of the appropriate behaviour: 'Do this werk evermore with-outyn cesyng & with-outyn discrecion, & thou schalt wel kun beginne & ceese in all thin other werkes with a

grete discrecion. For I may not trowe that a soule contynowyng in this werk night & day with-outyn discrecion schuld mowe erre in any of theese outward doinges; & elles me think that he schuld alweis erre'.¹⁶³ The crucial difference between Richard's treatment of discretion and that of the author of The Cloud is the part each writer assigns to it; for Richard, discretion is an essential means to an end. In the Cloud corpus, it is a by-product of the one essential, whole-hearted love of God. If the contemplative concentrates single-mindedly on God, to the exclusion of thoughts on all other matters, including self, then discretion develops, either as a gift of grace, or a more earthly type of wisdom, to guide in everyday life. This difference, however, should not distract us from the recognition that it was Richard of St. Victor who developed the notion of discretion, almost from nothing; and that it is to him, accordingly, that the author of The Cloud owes a major debt for one of the most distinctive ideas in his own work, for he undoubtedly used Richard's account, building on it, adapting it to fit his own ideas, and in some ways, perhaps closer to the Augustinian phrase which could have been the background for the whole concept.

The second area where we find a Victorine influence on The Cloud stemming from an Augustinian foundation, is in the work of reason and love. Both Hugh and Richard begin by tracing an hierarchical system wherein we begin with earthly things and through the use of human reason and intellect move upwards into the realm of the spiritual, at the frontiers of which reason must

be abandoned. In the Didascalion Hugh makes it clear that learning is no end in itself, rather its purpose is to bring us to the understanding of the highest truth, so the soul is led upwards, away from all earthly concerns towards God: 'Following the shadow one comes to the body: learn the figure and you will come to the truth'.¹⁶⁴ Elsewhere he considers the limitations of knowledge as opposed to loving, saying, 'Plus enim deligitur, quam intelligitur, et intrat delectio, et appropinquat, ubi scientia foris est'.¹⁶⁵ Clearly, for all his emphasis on the importance of learning (for Hugh, readiness to learn is the mark of humility, it is vain and proud to believe one does not need to learn) and the value of human reason, the last stages of the contemplative's journey are reached through love, and it is through love that we are finally admitted to the sight of God.

In Richard there is the same movement from creation to creator, most succinctly set out in the first book of Benjamin Major, where he explains six different stages in contemplation, only the last two of which are concerned with the contemplation of God. Nonetheless, each stage must be passed through in turn. The senses, imagination, and reason are all important in the early stages, but they are abandoned one by one, until by the last two the contemplative is entirely dependent on grace, and love takes over from reason; the soul burns with desire for God and finally is carried out of itself in ecstasy. So Richard makes a direct transition from the Augustinian way of knowledge to the Dionysian concept of knowing in unknowing; there is not in Richard as in St. Augustine a constant and continuing interaction

between love and reason, and ultimately, having reached its limits, the latter must be deliberately rejected, put behind. We have seen above how St. Augustine introduced love of God as motivation for the journey of the soul, and how he also wished to retain the use of reason alongside love. Now, in Richard of St. Victor, we find the missing link between St. Augustine and The Cloud, where the relationship between reason and love may be likened to the Thomist view of nature and grace; love takes over when reason may go no further.

In The Cloud the immediate emphasis is on the importance of love, and the value of reason is scarcely touched on. Historical circumstances partially account for this; the Victorines wrote at the dawn of the scholastic age, the author of The Cloud at its twilight, when confidence in human reason was weakened. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to describe the author as anti-intellectual, for there is a great difference between not using reason at all, and recognising the limits of reason, and not attempting to use it beyond them, which is the course of The Cloud. Certainly, the author is aware of the dangers of learning for it can be a source of pride, and can lead to heresy; he reiterates, many times, that we cannot reach God through reason, only through love; '& oure soule, bi vertewe of this reformyng grace, is mad sufficient at the fulle to comprehende al him by loue, the whiche is incomprehensible to alle create knowable might, as is aungel & mans soule'.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the reason certainly has its place in the search for God; it is one of the principal powers of the soul, and when illuminated by grace it

distinguishes good from evil, so working in co-operation with the will, which chooses good rather than evil.¹⁶⁷ However, because in The Cloud we come in at the level beyond the distinguishing and choice of the good, it may appear that reason has no part to play. The concentration of the mind, in meditation, is similarly left behind; but meditation is acknowledged as helpful, and essential, as a part of the contemplative's journey, and the system of reading, thinking, and prayer. A general impression of The Cloud as anti-intellectual, despising human reason, may be acquired easily; but it is an impression which can also be easily refuted, arising as it does from the misconception that denying the place of reason in the upper reaches of the contemplative life means denying it has any place at all in the spiritual journey towards God. The fact is that the author of The Cloud, like Hugh and Richard, saw reason and love as co-operating forces, working in a linear way. This is most obvious in Richard, because he deals with the whole spiritual life, and we see the theory worked out, where reason works, where it stops, and where love takes over; in The Cloud the concern is only with the sphere of love. Richard's emphasis on the illumination of the intellect, lacking in The Cloud, may also give the impression that he has a greater use for reason, knowledge, the intellect, than does the English writer; but for Richard too there is in the end room only for love, if union is to be attained, and a fusion of the Dionysian and the Augustinian leads at last to a fulfillment of mystical doctrine in Richard of St. Victor, which was very important for the author of The Cloud.

Discretion, and the relationship between reason and love are the two most important areas of Victorine influence on The Cloud. The psychological analysis of man discussed above as an Augustinian debt was also a major part of Richard's teaching, and indeed may have come to the author of The Cloud from Richard, rather than directly from St. Augustine. There are many other areas of common ground where influence is less certain; for example the definition of virtue we find in Richard is almost identical to that of The Cloud: 'For virtue is essentially an ordered and moderate affection of the soul.'¹⁶⁸ 'For vertewe is not elles bot an ordeinde & a mesurid affeccion, plainly directe vnto God for him-self'.¹⁶⁹ But the author of The Cloud could just as easily have derived this directly from St. Augustine as from Richard. Likewise with the definition of contemplation as beginning on earth, but going on in heaven: 'Quia contemplativa hic incipit et in coelesti patria perficitur'.¹⁷⁰ '& the ferthe may bi grace be bigonnen here, bot it schal ever laste with-uten eende in the blis of heuen'.¹⁷¹ In such spheres, direct influence could never be claimed; but there are so many of these echoes that, taken along with the two areas where influence is undeniable, they indicate a profound similarity of outlook between the twelfth century Victorines and the fourteenth century English writer.

Moving from Richard of St. Victor, whose debt to Dionysian mysticism was, like that of The Cloud, even greater than the debt to Augustinianism, we come to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, one of

the very few medieval mystics who does not show in his thought any debt to Dionysius. It may be somewhat surprising that The Cloud, the supreme example of Western Dionysianism, should also reveal the influence of St. Bernard strongly. Nevertheless, the hand of the twelfth century Cistercian is clearly to be seen and some of his work - like that of Dionysius and Richard of St. Victor - was sufficiently highly esteemed to appear, in paraphrased translation, as the Treatise of Discerning of Spirits.

In his article 'Sources and Theology in The Cloud of Unknowing' J.P.H. Clark examines several points of similarity between the two; for example the emphasis on the divinity of Christ, rather than the humanity of Jesus, as the focal point of man's love, which is the point behind St. Bernard's development of the idea of carnal and spiritual love, and which is traced further back, to St. Augustine.¹⁷² This is certainly a feature of The Cloud, most succinctly expressed in the story of Mary and Martha: 'sche beheeld not to the besines of hir sister, thof al hir besines was ful good & ful holy ... ne yit to the preciouste of his blessid body, ne to the swete voyce & the wordes of his Manheed ... bot to the souereynest wisdom of his Godhead lappid in the derk wordes of his Manheed'.¹⁷³ J.P.H. Clark also discusses the sense of loss and loneliness on the withdrawal of grace, which we find described in the Epistle of Privy Counsel, and compares this with St. Bernard's vicissitudo.¹⁷⁵ The third point of similarity he brings up is the reference to short prayer prayed in the height and depth, length and breadth of the spirit,

which is based on St. Bernard's De Consideratione.¹⁷⁶ These last two points, however, are, like so many of the similarities between The Cloud and the Victorines, The Cloud and St. Bonaventura, The Cloud and Meister Eckhart, so much a part of the mystical tradition that source would be impossible to prove.

There are also other areas, not mentioned by J.P.H. Clark, perhaps because they are so obvious, where St. Bernard and the author of The Cloud are in agreement. The principal one, of course, is the emphasis on love; for if the author of The Cloud did not derive this directly from St. Bernard, nevertheless the debt of the West in general to St. Bernard must be acknowledged, and the atmosphere in which The Cloud was written may undoubtedly be traced back to St. Bernard. As we have seen, St. Augustine laid the foundations for this, and in the Victorines love came to play the essential role in the mystical process; nevertheless, it was St. Bernard who changed the face of Western theology, and however harsh he appeared in his outward life, his major achievement was in the shift of emphasis from the image of God as judge, with fear of God the dominant human feeling, to love of God, not simply for what he gives men, but for himself. With the background of this atmosphere the teaching of The Cloud, that love alone may pierce the cloud of unknowing is both logical and plausible; and the whole thrust of De Diligendo Deo, that love must be wholly grounded in God, while going further than The Cloud ever does in suggesting that even self will be loved, for God's sake, (perhaps this is due to St. Bernard's more scholastic approach) is of the same nature as the emphasis on loving the

pure being of God.¹⁷⁷

The importance of the will in this relationship is paramount: 'The disposition of the will in love is not a bargain; no stipulation enters into it. It is a voluntary movement of the affective faculty, an action of free will'.¹⁷⁸ Thus St. Bernard is once again a stepping-stone between St. Augustine and The Cloud, and in his emphasis on the choice men make is liable to have appeared attractive to the English writer who so evidently found St. Augustine somewhat unsatisfactory on the topic of free will: 'Much wiser should we be to make the choice not by experiment but by intelligence, for this we could do easily and not without result. The rational mind is swifter in its action than the carnal sense, and vastly more discerning. Indeed, God gives us reason for that very purpose, that it may guide the senses in their choice and see to it that they be not satisfied, except by that which reason has approved'.¹⁷⁹ And in the slight tension between this emphasis on the free will and choice of man, and the primary activity of God, St. Bernard again foreshadows The Cloud: 'He kindles thy desire Himself, who is Himself its Goal ... for he is both prime mover of our love and final end'.¹⁸⁰

Like the later writer, St. Bernard clearly envisages the search for contemplation as taking place within the monastic community, and as a part of the church, and the orthodoxy which prompts this view is a marked feature of both writers. St. Bernard, however, does not seem to have anything of the active/contemplative distinction which is so important not only in The Cloud but in the mystical tradition in general.

When we come to the actual union of the individual with God there are again important points of similarity between St. Bernard and The Cloud, one of the first being a strong sense of the ineffability of the mystical experience; 'there she beholds things invisible and hears things unutterable, of which it is not lawful for man to speak'.¹⁸¹ Both writers follow St. Augustine's notion that in God alone the soul finds its rest: 'Once God is found, the soul has rest'.¹⁸² In The Cloud the emphasis throughout is that contemplation is not a feeling of high ecstasy, but of peace and quiet, restfulness.¹⁸³ Most important, however, is the notion that union is of the spirit not of the substance. With this distinction St. Bernard avoided any heretical understanding of a union in which all distinctions between God and man are ended. Deification is certainly the goal: 'To become thus is to be deified'.¹⁸⁴ But man still remains man, there is no unity of substance. 'As a small drop of water, mingled in much wine, takes on its taste and color so completely that it appears no longer to exist apart from it; as molten, white-hot iron is so like the fire, it seems to have renounced its natural form ... so, with the saints, their human love will then ineffably be melted out of them and all poured over, so to speak, into the will of God. It must be so. How otherwise could God be "all in all", if anything of man remained in man? And yet our human substance will remain; we shall still be ourselves, but in another form, another glory and another power'.¹⁸⁵ This is achieved by the gradual and increasing conformity of the will with God's, thus, as M. Gilson points out,

deification consists of a unity of the will, or spirit.¹⁸⁶ The author of The Cloud, avoiding the dangers of absorption mysticism, followed the path of St. Bernard, emphasising as we might expect, the harmony of the will with God's: '& therefore I preie thee, lene listely to this meek steryng of love in thin herte, & folow ther-after; for it wil be thi gyde in this liif, & bring thee to blisse in the tother ... It is not elles bot a good & an acordyng wil vnto God'.¹⁸⁷ Twice the author refers specifically to the union of the spirit: 'that is to sey, to be knit to God in spirite, & in oneheed of love & acordaunce of wile'.¹⁸⁸ 'that is to sey, to be onyd to God in spirit & in love & in acordaunce of wille'.¹⁸⁹ Simultaneously the distinction between God and man is stressed: 'For whi he is God by kynde with-uten beginnyng; & thou that sumtyme were nought in substaunce ... So that, though thou be al one with hym in grace, yit thou arte ful fer binethe hym in kynde'.¹⁹⁰

Thus in their understanding of the basic nature of the union between God and man St. Bernard and the author of The Cloud are in close accord; but the later writer does not, of course, follow St. Bernard all along the line. The concept of the mystical marriage, so important to St. Bernard is hardly alluded to in The Cloud. It is mentioned,¹⁹¹ and so presumably accepted as appropriate, but it is not discussed at length. More important than this is the difference between the two as regards the imago dei. M. Gilson claims that for St. Bernard the restoration of the lost image is a central part of the process of union, in his words 'a disfiguring mask falls away',¹⁹² echoing Dionysius'

image of the sculptor revealing the truth hidden in a block of stone. While there is something of this in The Cloud, certainly a strong sense that in the mystical union man regains his rightful status, returns to his natural end, still the imago dei is not the very pivot of the mystical process as Gilson suggests it is for St. Bernard.

In conclusion, there are manifold echoes of St. Bernard in The Cloud, and two of these are particularly clear; first is the love of God which motivates the mystic. Although the groundwork for this was carried out by St. Augustine, it was St. Bernard who, in emphasising it, changed the mood of all Western theology, not simply mysticism. Love of God is at the very heart of the teaching of The Cloud and the debt to St. Bernard, as well as to the Victorines, is very clear. St. Bernard's second major influence on The Cloud is the unitas spiritus, an orthodox compromise which allowed a perfect and complete union but without fusion of the substance of God with the substance of man; as J.P.H. Clark points out,¹⁹³ this notion was also used by William of St. Thierry, another influence on The Cloud. The inheritance from St. Bernard was certainly a major one, pertaining to crucial areas of thought, but for all that we are not left with a feeling of oneness between the two authors, or that they shared a fundamentally similar outlook on matters mystical and theological, as we are with, for example, The Cloud and Hugh of St. Victor, even if the specific contributions of Hugh were not as seminal as St. Bernard's undoubtedly were.

Above are discussed some of the most probable sources of

some of the major themes of The Cloud; many other names and works have been brought forwards as potential influences. One glaringly obvious omission in the above study has been the scriptural influence. Part of the reason for this is that the mysticism of The Cloud is not scriptural in its foundation; scripture is important, as we will see, as a source of information about the mystical life, when treated allegorically, but even here it is used sparingly. Other sources not discussed above include Gregory the Great. In general terms, he displays similarities with The Cloud in his emphasis on the contemplative life, in particular its value as higher than the active life, and the importance of purification and the purgative way.

More particularly, J.P.H. Clark refers to the pain suffered by those first discovering their own sin by God's illumination,¹⁹⁴ and to the cloud of unknowing envisaged as a consequence of our sin, rather than our created state.¹⁹⁵ William of St. Thierry is also projected as an important source, although he is close, on many points, to St. Bernard it would be impossible to suggest which, if either, was preferred by the English writer. William has the triadic analysis of man's soul which we find in The Cloud, and in particular the emphasis on the primacy of the will, and the choice man makes to return to God, and of course the importance of love in this choice. As is mentioned above, William also has the understanding of union as unitas spiritus; and Gilson's reference to William's notion that, at the summit of man's mind, there is a 'secret point'¹⁹⁶ clearly foreshadows The Cloud's 'souereyn poynte of thi spirit'.¹⁹⁷

J.P.H. Clark points out that William has the dual illumination of the intellect and love which is found in the Epistle of Prayer,¹⁹⁸ and more generally, that William, like Richard of St. Victor and the author of The Cloud, but unlike St. Bernard, has a double line of ancestry, not only St. Augustine but also Plotinus and Dionysius.¹⁹⁹

Thomas Gallus was undoubtedly of primary importance to the author of The Cloud, for it was his paraphrase of 'Mystical Theology', along with Johannes Sarracenus' Latin version, which was used as the basis of Denis Hid Divinity; in these texts there is a subtle shift of meaning, with the emphasis on the heart, rather than the mind, and the gap we noted in the Dionysian account is filled. Undoubtedly the author would have found this version more satisfactory than the original. Thomas Gallus also has the unitas spiritus, and J.P.H. Clark compares his theory of the apex affectionis principalis with The Cloud's 'sovereryn' pointe'.²⁰⁰ David Knowles comments that Fr. Walsh has suggested that Gallus was the major influence on The Cloud, but points out that several of the major characteristics of The Cloud are not to be found in Thomas Gallus,²⁰¹ notably the insistence on the naked concentration of love, the distinction between perfect and imperfect humility and charity, the ineffability of the contemplative experience, and the very practical advice. Yet again, we find that a major influence has been added to and improved upon.

Finally, we come to the two great scholastics, St. Thomas and St. Bonaventura, both of whom have been posited as influences

on The Cloud, somewhat unusually perhaps. Don Knowles has even suggested that the author was himself a Dominican, for this he feels is the only explanation for the adherence to a Thomist doctrine of grace; but this seems unlikely given the undoubted likeness to St. Bonaventura, although again, it may well felt that this can be attributed to the common sources. Certainly by the time we come to St. Bonaventura so many sources are common that this could be so. Like the earlier influences of Hugh and Richard of St. Victor, St. Bonaventura (whom they likewise influenced) was an Augustinian who emphasised strongly the work of the intellect, and the illumination of the intellect but in the end abandoned this for a mystical union in love and darkness. In his mystical works a schema very similar in many ways to that of The Cloud is worked out. He begins with the belief that contemplation is the natural goal of men, only the effects of original sin have turned them away from this: 'According to the original plan of nature, man was made fit for the repose of contemplation; ... But man turned away from the true light, stooping down to unstable goods; so he was himself bent down by personal sin, and his whole posterity by original sin'.²⁰² Nevertheless, the natural desire of the soul is for God, as in The Cloud, the Trinity,²⁰³ and by the grace of God, it is enabled to return. Predictably the necessity of grace is emphasised, and in words which are clearly echoed by The Cloud: 'Such a motion as this is something mystical and very secret, and no one knows it except him who receives it, and no one receives it except him who desires it, and no one desires it unless the

fire of the Holy Spirit, whom Christ sent to earth, inflames him to the very marrow'.²⁰⁴ In this journey towards God, things of this world must be rejected, 'Therefore, all love of creatures, without reservation, must be rooted out of our hearts,'²⁰⁵ and the value of the solitary life is emphasised: 'Nothing better helps a religious to remain silent than flight from the company of others and the pursuits of a life of solitude'.²⁰⁶ St. Bonaventura also states clearly his belief that the via negativa is the highest way to God: 'But there is another, and higher, approach: that is, by manner of negation. As Denis says: "(When applied to God,) affirmations are inadequate, while negations are wholly true". Negations seem to say less but actually they say more'.²⁰⁷ And for all the emphasis on the activity of the intellect and the rational powers of the soul, love is acknowledged as the one way to God: 'Now, in this seventh chapter, we have to deal with the very essence of all virtue, that is, love, which alone leads man to perfection'.²⁰⁸ 'If this passing over is to be perfect, all intellectual operations must be given up, and the sharp point of our desire must be entirely directed towards God and transformed in Him'.²⁰⁹

Undeniably, St. Bonaventura and the anonymous author had much in common, but there were also many differences between them. St. Bonaventura has a much stronger scriptural foundation, and a far greater use for illumination of the intellect. In the Franciscan tradition, there is an emphasis on the crucifixion which is completely absent in The Cloud. More important than the differences, however, is the fact that in The Cloud we do not

find anything that is unique to St. Bonaventura. If he influenced the author, it was in general terms, as an Augustinian theologian with a strongly spiritual motivation, whose debt to Dionysius was great, and the relationship between the two could as easily be one of pure similarity, as of influence.

The case is somewhat different with St. Thomas Aquinas. Similarities are undoubtedly far fewer, for the realm of the purely spiritual seems to be of far less importance to St. Thomas than to St. Bonaventura, although in the end, of course, St. Thomas renounced his academic theology. But throughout his works there is an emphasis on the importance of the mind and the rational powers, not balanced, as in St. Bonaventura, by an emphasis on love, although a belief in the power of love is certainly there: 'The Gift of Wisdom gives a man this eminent knowledge as a result of his union with God, and this union of the spirit can only be by love, for 'he who cleaveth to God is of one spirit with Him'.²¹⁰ This union is, however, envisaged in much more intellectual terms than among mystics in general; the emphasis is that union is with God as the truth, rather than God as himself. It is not as a mystic that St. Thomas was important to the author of The Cloud, but as a theologian, and in particular it is his doctrine of grace which is seen as his contribution to The Cloud. David Knowles states that The Cloud's teaching on grace is thoroughly Thomist, against the views prevailing in England at that time;²¹¹ the doctrine of grace is discussed in Chapter II, but it should be said here that the understanding of grace found in The Cloud, a compelling force in

itself, stirring the will of men towards God, is of the same nature as St. Thomas' operant grace. The structure of the relationship of nature and grace is also an inheritance from St. Thomas; not only are there specific references to this,²¹² but it is the very basis of the idea of progression, from active to contemplative, ordinary to perfect. However, there is not for the author of The Cloud such a clear cut division between the two realms as for St. Thomas. Certainly, the message of The Cloud is that nature only goes so far, and grace must complete and perfect the work; but we cannot say that the function of grace is restricted to this work of perfection as in St. Thomas. That is, the author has a place for grace along a much broader spectrum than the strictest understanding of Thomism would indicate. Nevertheless, while St. Thomas could not perhaps offer much to the author of The Cloud in the purely spiritual area, his influence was considerable in the understanding of grace, which is so essential a part of The Cloud's mystical doctrine.

The intention of the above chapter has been to show how The Cloud was the product of many sources; in the spirit of a truly learned and humble man the author did not restrict himself to one particular tradition, but willingly drew on all he could find. To the vast inheritance which the scholarship of twelve hundred years gave him, he brought his own ideas and outlook, and there is nowhere that we can say that this idea has been lifted, whole and untouched, from this source and from no other. The result is a highly individual piece of work, benefiting from traditional teaching, and from newer, more innovative thought, yet neither

restricted by the one, nor tainted by the possible heresy of the other. The result of this, the author's own theology, and the way it fitted in with his mystical teaching, will be examined in the following chapter.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Gregory rejected some of Origen's ideas, such as the pre-existence of the soul, and modified others, but retained, for example, his tendency towards universalism, which was to bring about criticism, and in the fourteenth century there was some alteration of manuscripts for reasons of orthodoxy.
2. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, transl. A.J. Malherbe and E. Ferguson, Paulist Press, New York, 1978, p. 115.
Hereafter referred to as The Life of Moses.
3. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 115.
4. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 96.
5. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 99.
6. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 93.
7. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 102.
8. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 71.
9. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 72.
10. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 31.
11. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 59.
12. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 108.
13. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 93.
14. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 82.
15. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, pp. 60,61.
16. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling, published for the Early English Text Society, Oxford University Press, London 1944, p. 16. Hereafter cited as The Cloud.

17. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 94.
18. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, pp. 94,95.
19. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 11.
20. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 93.
21. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, p. 84.
22. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 68.
23. '& trewly who so wil loke Denis bookes he schal fynde that
his wordes wilen cleerly aferme al that I have seyde or
schal sey, fro the beginnyng of this tretis to the ende'.
P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 125.
24. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. lxi.
25. J. McCann ed., The Cloud of Unknowing, Burnes and Oates,
London, 1952, p. xvi.
26. Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names and The Mystical
Theology, transl. C.E. Rolt, S.P.C.K. London, 1940.
Hereafter cited as The Divine Names.
27. Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names, p. 191.
28. By Dom David Knowles, in The Evolution of Medieval Thought,
Longman, London, 1962, p. 58.
29. Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names, p. 198.
30. Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names, p. 191.
31. Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names, p. 194.
32. Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names, p. 193.
33. Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names, p. 88.
34. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 26.
35. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 42.
36. Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names, p. 198.
37. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 62.

38. Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names, p. 192.
39. Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names, p. 191.
40. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 62.
41. Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names, p. 94.
42. 'For this is the werk, as thou schalt here after (that is, taking heed of all impulses of the will) in the whiche man schuld haue contynowed, if he never had synned, & to the whiche sorching man was maad ...' P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 19.
43. Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names, p. 86.
44. Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names, p. 52.
45. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 94.
46. J.P.H. Clark, 'Sources and Theology in 'The Cloud of Unknowing'', The Downside Review, vol. 98, 1980, p. 84.
47. Hugh of St. Victor, De Arca Noe Morali, Lib I, in R.C. Petry, ed., Late Medieval Mysticism, Westminster press, Philadelphia, 1957, p. 93.
48. Hugh of St. Victor, Soliloquium de Arrha Animae, in Migne, Patrologia Latina, Paris, 1879, vol. 176, cols. 951-970, col. 966. Hereafter cited as Hugh of St. Victor, Solil., PL. 176.
49. Hugh of St. Victor, Solil, PL. 176, col. 970.
50. e.g. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 17.
51. Hugh of St. Victor, Solil, PL 176, col. 970.
52. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 132.

53. Richard of Saint-Victor, Selected Writings on Contemplation.
Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Clare
Kirchberger, Fabor and Fabor, London, 1957, pp. 65,68.
Hereafter cited as Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings.
54. Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 65,
55. Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 156.
56. Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 176.
57. Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 133.
58. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 62.
59. Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 155.
60. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 28.
61. Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 176
62. Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 185.
63. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 24.
64. Thus compare Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings
pp. 108,109, with P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 82.
65. Cf. Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 133 and
P. Hodgson ed, The Cloud, p. 62.
66. Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 229.
67. This is by Dr. R. Lovatt of Peterhouse, Cambridge, as cited
by C. Nieva in This Transcending God, Mitre Press, London,
1971, p. 18.
68. Meister Eckhart, A Modern Translation by R.B. Blakney,
Harper & Row, New York, 1941, p. 78. Hereafter cited as
Meister Eckhart.
69. Meister Eckhart, p. 148.
70. Meister Eckhart, p. 57.
71. Meister Eckhart, p. 61.

72. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 25.
73. Meister Eckhart, p. 121.
74. Meister Eckhart, p. 53.
75. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 24. It is very interesting to note here the different analogies used by the two writers. Meister Eckhart's analogy is internal; the self must be emptied of all things so that God may come into the soul. In The Cloud the analogy is external; things must be put below self, so that the soul may reach outwards and upwards to God. The belief that contemplation is something which takes place entirely internally is carried on in one of Meister Eckhart's most striking characteristics, the eternal birth of the son in the soul, which makes possible the union of God and man. This notion is, of course, entirely lacking in The Cloud; obviously, if the anonymous writer was aware of it, he had no desire to fit this Eckhartian hall-mark into his own teaching.
76. Meister Eckhart, p. 5.
77. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 82,83.
78. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 44-47.
79. Meister Eckhart, p.50.
80. Meister Eckhart, p. 21.
81. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 40-43.
82. Meister Eckhart, p. 9.
83. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 28.
84. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 18.
85. Meister Eckhart, p. 114.
86. J. Clark, Meister Eckhart, Nelson, London, 1957, p. 155.

87. The Cloud also refers to union as 'rest' or 'sleep'. See P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 152.
88. Meister Eckhart, p. 102.
89. Meister Eckhart, p. 107.
90. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 32.
91. Meister Eckhart, p. 145.
92. Meister Eckhart, p. 242.
93. Meister Eckhart, p. 247.
94. Meister Eckhart, p. 55. The Cloud also uses the analogy of the spark and the flame. See P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 22.
95. Meister Eckhart, p. 29.
96. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 120.
97. Meister Eckhart, p. 14.
98. Meister Eckhart, p. 163.
99. Meister Eckhart, p. 12.
100. Meister Eckhart, p. 124.
101. Meister Eckhart, p. 12.
102. For in this choice is included getting rid of all externals.
103. Meister Eckhart, p. 77.
104. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 18.
105. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 18.
106. Meister Eckhart, p. 88.
107. Meister Eckhart, p. 88.
108. Meister Eckhart, p. 237.
109. Meister Eckhart, p. 237.
110. Meister Eckhart, p. 151.
111. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 33.

112. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 81.
113. Meister Eckhart, p. 54.
114. Meister Eckhart, p. 233.
115. Meister Eckhart, p. 244.
116. Meister Eckhart, p. 82.
117. Meister Eckhart, p. 90.
118. Meister Eckhart, p. 140.
119. Meister Eckhart, p. 243.
120. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 18,19.
121. Meister Eckhart, p. 9.
122. This aspect of The Cloud will be discussed below; in Meister Eckhart we see it, for example, in Meister Eckhart, p. 238.
123. St. Augustine, Confessions. Everyman edition, trans. Pusey, Dent, London, 1907, p. 1. Hereafter cited as St. Augustine, Confessions.
124. J.P.H. Clark, 'Sources and Theology in 'The Cloud of Unknowing'', The Downside Review, vol 98, 1980, pp. 83-109, p. 87.
125. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 136.
126. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 134.
127. This is further discussed in chapter two.
128. He clearly refers to the presence of original sin in young babies, see St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 7.
129. See J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, Harper & Row, London, 1958, 1960².
130. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 30.
131. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 36.

132. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 36 and St. Augustine, Sermon on Purgatory, cited in St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Prima Secundae, Quaest. 87, A.2, contra.
133. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 21.
134. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 88.
135. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 135.
136. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 86.
137. P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite and other Treatises on Contemplative Prayer published for the Early English Text Society, Oxford University Press, London 1955, p. 90.
Hereafter cited as Deonise Hid Divinite.
138. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 308.
139. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 121.
140. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 69.
141. In P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 114-119.
142. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 346.
143. St. Augustine, The City of God. T & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1872, p. 92.
144. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 155.
145. St. Augustine, 'Diligo et quod vis fac'.
146. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 333.
147. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 183.
148. As seen especially in, for example, P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 83-85.
149. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 113.
150. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 229.
151. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 315.
152. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 314.

153. St. Augustine, Confessions, pp. 207,208.
154. St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 286.
155. P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite, p. 54.
156. Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 105.
157. Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 107.
158. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 79,80.
159. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 80.
160. That is, the Epistle of Discretion in Stirrings, in
P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite, pp. 62-77.
161. P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite, p. 74.
162. P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite, p. 71.
163. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 81.
164. Hugh of St. Victor, Didascalion, transl, and introduction by
J. Taylor, Columbia University Press, New York, 1961,
p. 138.
165. Hugh of St. Victor, Expositio in heirarchiam Coelestiam S.
Dionysii Areopagatae, PL vol. 175, col. 1038.
166. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 18.
167. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 116.
168. Richard of St. Victor, Selected Writings, p. 85.
169. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 39.
170. Hugh of St. Victor, Allegoriae in Novum Testamentum, PL 175,
cols. 751-924, col. 816.
171. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 13.
172. J.P.H. Clark, 'Sources and Theology in 'The Cloud of
Unknowing'', Downside Review vol. 98, 1980, pp. 95,96.
Hereafter cited as J.P.H. Clark, 'Sources and Theology'.
173. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 47.

174. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 167.
175. J.P.H. Clark, 'Sources and Theology', p. 97.
176. J.P.H. Clark, 'Sources and Theology', p. 101.
177. e.g. in P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite, p. 53.
178. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, On The Love of God trans, in The Library of Christian Classics, Late Medieval Mysticism, ed., R.C. Petry, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1957, pp. 55,56.
179. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, On The Love of God, p. 58.
180. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, On The Love of God, p. 59.
Compare this with P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 34.
181. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, De Grad. Humilitatis, c. 7, PL vol. 182, col. 953 (cit. E. Gilson, The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard, trans, A.H.C. Dowens, Sheed & Ward, London, 1940, p. 103). Compare with P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 62.
182. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, On The Love of God, p. 58.
183. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 152.
184. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, On The Love of God, p. 64.
185. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, On The Love of God, p. 64, 65.
186. E. Gilson, The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard, p. 120ff.
187. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 92.
188. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 32.
189. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 120.
190. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 120.
191. e.g. in P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 15, and P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite, p. 56.
192. E. Gilson, The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard, p. 127.

193. J.P.H. Clark, 'Sources and Theology', p. 98.
194. J.P.H. Clark, 'Sources and Theology', p. 99.
195. J.P.H. Clark, 'Sources and Theology', p. 89.
196. E. Gilson, The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard, p. 91.
197. P. Hodgson ed, The Cloud, p. 169.
198. J.P.H. Clark, 'Sources and Theology', p. 91.
199. J.P.H. Clark, 'Sources and Theology', p. 104.
200. J.P.H. Clark, 'Sources and Theology', p. 100.
201. D. Knowles, The English Mystical Tradition, Burns & Oates, London, 1960, p. 73. Hereafter cited as D. Knowles, The English Mystical Tradition.
202. St. Bonaventura, The Works of Bonaventura, transl. J. de Vinck, vol. I, p. 12. Hereafter cited as, St. Bonaventura, The Works.
203. St. Bonaventura, The Works, p. 33.
204. St. Bonaventura, The Works, p. 57. Compare this with P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 70.
205. St. Bonaventura, The Works, p. 71.
206. St. Bonaventura, The Works, p. 230.
207. St. Bonaventura, The Works, p. 93.
208. St. Bonaventura, The Works, p. 248.
209. St. Bonaventura, The Works, p. 57.
210. St. Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on the Sentences, D. 35, q.2, art. 1 (cited in D. Knowles, The Evolution of Medieval Thought, Longman, London, 1962, p. 268).
211. D. Knowles, The English Mystical Tradition, pp. 94,95.
212. e.g. in P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 154, 155.

CHAPTER TWO

THE THEOLOGY

The theology of the Cloud corpus, as might be expected of an orthodox medieval writer, is set firmly within a Trinitarian framework. From the days of the Early Church up until the Enlightenment all orthodox theology was worked out unquestioningly against a Trinitarian background, and to this rule The Cloud was no exception. Nevertheless, this view has not been accepted universally, for Fr. Constantino Nieva has claimed that to see The Cloud in a Trinitarian framework is inadequate, and fails to do justice to the essential unity of the work. He even suggests that the whole Trinitarian concept is incompatible with the idea of the mystical union.¹ In answer to the first point, it is needful only to say that perhaps it is Fr. Nieva's understanding of the Trinity which is inadequate, for he does not seem cognizant of the essential unity therein. With regard to his second objection, we must wonder why he sees the two as mutually exclusive rather than complementary, as they so obviously are. In the mystical union the contemplative sees God as he truly is, as the Triune God; anything else would be an incomplete view, not the Beatific Vision. In The Cloud the union for which the contemplative spends his life working is indubitably a union with the Trinity, the whole Godhead, God in himself. It must be remembered that in none of his works does

the author have much to say about this union. It is clear that he has himself experienced some foretaste of it, but he is well aware of the inadequacy of our language to describe it, and he therefore makes no attempt to do so: 'For of that werke that fallith to only God dar I not take upon me to speke with my blabryng fleschely tonge'.² Nevertheless, in fleeting references to the union it is made clear that the contemplative is united with the whole God, not with the Son, or with the Spirit, but with the Trinity. The crucial phrase is 'as he is in himself' and echoes of this are found several times: 'the precious beyng of God in him-self only as he is, withouten more'.³ 'this soule, seing the loueliness of God in himself ..'⁴ It is interesting to note that the quotation from the Epistle of Privy Counsel is carried on from a reference to a healing by Jesus, thus making clear the involvement of the Son in the contemplative's search for ultimate union with God. Lending more obvious support to the theory that union is with the Trinity are the author's descriptions of it as a complete union, involving the whole man: 'Abouen thi-self thou arte: for whi thou atteynest to come thedir by grace, whether thou mayest not come by kynde; that is to sey, to be onyd to God in spirit & in love & in accordaunce of will.'⁵ The whole man is involved, and to make it complete, so also must the whole God be. The author's words on this topic, the very heart of The Cloud, may be few and far between, but they make it very evident that the Trinity is as involved in this ultimate goal as in the life of the contemplative as he strives towards it. Not only in the life of

the contemplative, but in that of all Christians, ordinary and special, the involvement of all the persons of the Trinity may be seen. On these major issues as on others, the author of The Cloud is well within the mainstream of Christian and mystical orthodoxy.

However, in the field of Trinitarian doctrine as in any other, orthodoxy was not unanimous, but divided into two groups. These were not warring factions, nor were the analogies they chose rival claimants to the truth; there was no necessary tension between the two, but writers did tend to choose one and use it with greater emphasis, perhaps because it seemed to them more serviceable, or because it fitted in better with their general outlook and schema. The psychological analogy of the Trinity as mind, reason and will, which was St. Augustine's great contribution, begins with the essential unity of the Trinity; the more purely Platonic analogy of the self-diffusing Good begins rather with the plurality, thence moving to the unity. This latter is perhaps easier to grasp conceptually, but many were doubtful as to whether it expressed the essential unity of the Trinity. Equally, there were problems for those who began with the unity, for they in turn had difficulties with the plurality of God. However, the notion that opera ad extra .. sunt indivisa went a long way towards easing these.

In The Cloud we find no use of St. Augustine's actual analogy; but we do find a thoroughly Monist stance, traceable equally to the author's own devotion to neo-Platonism and to his desire to stay within the mainstream of western orthodoxy. He

emphasises the unity of the Godhead, the essential one-ness of the three persons: 'So that as God may not be fro his beyng for onheed in kynde, ..'⁶ Accordingly, references to God the Father, the Son (other than as an historic figure) and the Holy Spirit are rare. Instead the author uses, almost throughout, the all-embracing 'God' meaning Godhead or Trinity. It is obvious from the context if the specific function or action of one member is being referred to, and ultimately this is a more accurate use of language, theologically, for it is always the Triune God of whom the author is speaking. This is seen particularly clearly in the first chapter of The Cloud where the activities of all the persons of the Trinity are referred to under the umbrella term 'God': 'the euerlasting love of his Godheed, thorow the whiche he mad thee & wrought thee when thou were nought, & sithen bought thee with the prise of his precious blood when thou were loste in Adam, might not suffre thee be so far fro him in forme & degree of levyng. & therfore he kyndelid thi desire ful graciously, & fastnid bi it a lyame of longing ...'⁷ There is here no sign of any struggle to find a unity within the Trinity, nor any problem with the roles of the three persons. In neo-Platonic tradition the author began with the idea of the unity of the Trinity as a sine qua non, and from this point the specific activities of the three persons were worked out.

If the concept of the unity of the Trinity was an important inheritance from the neo-Platonists, there was another which coloured even more deeply his mystical outlook. This is the idea of God as pure, uncreated Being. The leap from the immanent

Christian Triune God, with all the attendant implications of empathy with and involvement in mankind and his history, to the transcendent God, pure Being, without attributes and wholly incomprehensible, is obviously a difficult one to make, for there is a great logical tension inherent in these two pictures of the one being. Yet St. Augustine had held fast to both, and the English writer attempted to do the same. It is difficult to imagine that he was unaware of the problem; while The Cloud is not a scholarly work as such, it is the work of a scholar, aware of such problems of logic, as his discourses on analogy show. But as a devout man and a mystic the author was aware that this was precisely what the problem was, a logical one, not more or less. An exponent of the via negativa, a contemplative already far advanced in the mystical life, he could not envisage a God restricted by any human limitations, and if our logic or our language is inadequate to grasp or depict the infinitude of God, and his many facets, then we must recognise that it is in us that the shortcoming lies, and not attempt to pass on the inadequacy to God. In The Cloud the two very different images of God are blended and balanced with such skill that its readers may forget how very complicated the issue is, how difficult to grasp that the incomprehensible God is yet not unknowable to the contemplative who approaches him in love.

Predictably, this very complicated phenomenon is presented in words of great simplicity. The Christian Triune God is at one and the same time naked, uncreated Being, totally self-sufficient and untouched by creatures. Our activities cannot affect him,

our words cannot describe him; but as he is pure Being, so is he the source of all other, created being, and it is in this way that man comes into contact with God, for we are wholly dependent on him for everything we are: 'For he is thi beyng, & in him thou arte that at thou arte, not only bi cause & bi beyng, bot also he is in thee bothe thi cause & thi beyng⁸ ... he is thi beyng & thou not his. For thof if be so that alle thinges ben in hym bi cause & bi beyng & he be in alle things here cause & here being, yit in him-self only he is his owne cause & his owne being. For as nothing may be with-outyn him, so may he not be with-outyn him-self. Hi is being bothe to him-self & to alle. & in that he is only departid from alle that he is being bothe of hym-self & of alle; & in that he is one in alle & alle in him that alle thinges han her beinges in him & he is being of alle'.⁹ This emphasis on the Being of God, which came from the Augustinian tradition, fits in logically with the author's choice of the via negativa, which was part of his inheritance from Dionysius. Speculation on the attributes of God is both pointless and irrelevant, the one thing that is essential for the contemplative is to recognise that God is pure Being, and to concentrate whole-heartedly, in love, on that Being.¹⁰ In The Cloud the logical problem of the reconciliation of the immanent and the transcendent God is solved by the notion of love, which is the hall-mark of The Cloud. Love caused the pure Being to create, and then become involved in his creation, and love enables the individual to approach the true vision and understanding of God, Being and Trinity-Godhead.

In conclusion, it is perhaps unnecessary to state the obvious, namely, that if one does not appreciate how central the Holy Trinity is to the author of The Cloud, both on earth and in the Beatific Vision, then one has failed to appreciate The Cloud itself and the fullness of the vision and expression therein of the Christian mystical life. Without the contribution of all the persons of the Trinity the life of the contemplative could not reach its ultimate goal of union with all three persons of the Godhead, the pure Being. Throughout his works the author maintains a balance between the specific contributions each member of the Trinity makes, and the ultimate and essential unity of the three. He makes no startling contribution to Trinitarian doctrine, but appears as thoroughly orthodox, and with clarity and precision he presents his insight that, by the introduction of love to the equation, the transcendent and the immanent God are one.

Moving from the author's understanding of the Trinity to his view of the individual members of the Trinity we again find him balancing different characteristics, managing to avoid the tension and contradictions which could so naturally arise. Above is mentioned the potential difficulty of the immanent and the transcendent God, and the person of God the Father would seem to present similar problems, although admittedly problems of personality rather than of essence; for he is both omnipotent Creator, far above his creation, witnessing the downfall of mankind and allowing sin to go unpunished and simultaneously he

is loving Father, grieving over fallen creation and caring deeply for his creatures. In The Cloud this dual personality is presented clearly in all its facets - and also plausibly.

It should be noted that, properly speaking, discussion of God the Father should only be in the context of God as the Father of the Son; other characteristics - Father of Man, Creation, and so on, are really properties of the Triune God. But here, for the sake of convenience, these are discussed under the heading of Father. Indeed, on the subject of the relationship between Father and Son, the author is singularly silent, and there is no highly complex speculation on the topic, nor even simple statement of recognised truths. One of the most striking characteristics is that we are not presented with a picture of the Father sending the Son as sacrifice, and accepting that sacrifice. That is, the distinctions within the Trinity are played down, there is no subordination among the functions of the Godhead, but they are always seen as equal. The reason for this lies in the author's desire to emphasise the unity of the Trinity. Accordingly, the Incarnation is depicted as a deliberate choice on the part of the Trinity to become man and participate in men's salvation: 'I have clothid me in the comoun kynde of man, & maad me so opyn that I am the dore by my manheed'.¹¹ It is thus very definitely an act of coming, not of sending. Similarly, any reference to the sacrifice of Christ is in the context of the making of that sacrifice, not the accepting of it: 'right so a verey & a parfite sacrificer of him-self thus by a comon entent vnto alle doth that in him is to knit alle men

to God as effectuely as him-self is'.¹² Again, on the subject of the ascension of Christ, this is seen as an act of the Son, rather than as something granted by the Father: 'for whan the tyme statute was icomen that him likyd to weende to his Fader bodely in his Manheed - the whiche was neuer, ne neuer may be, absent in his Godheed ...'.¹³ The author's intention in this seems to be to show that the whole God is involved in all these acts, and thus to emphasise the unity of the Trinity. It is perhaps a concomitant of this purpose that the nature of the relationship between Father and Son is so scantily treated.

As well as being Father of the Son, God is also the Father of creation and of mankind. To discern the author's attitude to God the creator we must examine his attitude to creation and when we consider that most striking of images, the cloud of forgetting, it would seem immediately that it will be a very negative one. This, however is not so. The author is well aware of the beauty of creation, 'the kyndnes, & the wonderful werkes of God in his creatures bodily & goostly',¹⁴ admitting that 'it be ful profitable sumtyme to think of certeyne condicions & dedes of sum certein special creatures',¹⁵ - although he does not give an instance of such a time. The value of creation in giving us hints of what God is like must not be underestimated, for it is the only such tangible guide we have: 'By reason we mowe trace how mighty, how wise, & how good he is in his creatures ...'.¹⁶ However, this is offset by an awareness of the imperfections of creation, tainted as it is by sin. Indeed at times there is almost a hint of dualism¹⁷ in the emphasis that it is through the

things of the world and the weakness of the flesh that evil seeks to gain entrance to our souls: 'if thou slepe in this blynde beholdyng from al the noise & the steryng of the fel fende, the fals wored & the freel flessche, thou schalt not drede any peril'.¹⁸ As long as we remain on earth, we remain distanced from God: '& al the whiles that the soule wonith in this deedly body, euermore is the scharpnes of oure vnderstanding in beholding of alle goostly thinges, bot most specialy of God, medelid with sum maner of fantasie'.¹⁹ The main thrust of his argument seems to be, that creation is good in its place, and only there. For the contemplative this means far below him, beneath the cloud of forgetting, for as he reaches up higher into the cloud of unknowing, everything pertaining to this earth must be completely forgotten and ignored.

From this attitude to creation we may draw out the author's attitude to God as creator, - which is a slightly ambiguous one. On the one hand, he is lovingly responsible for all that surrounds men, which must be used and enjoyed and appreciated because it is his creation, and therefore he may be encountered in it. On the other hand, he is so far above it in essence, so pure, that it must be abandoned if one is to reach up towards him. There is no attempt to explain this dichotomy, we must simply accept it. God is both uncreated, and creator, and neither aspect is presented as having a greater claim to the truth. Both are true, although for the contemplative the picture of God as creator is of less relevance, for it is not the creating aspect of God which he seeks, but the pure Being. Yet,

this emphasis notwithstanding, it must not be construed that God the creator was unimportant to the author of The Cloud. Put most baldly, apart from the fact that man is a part of creation, if we did not have a creation, it could not be put under the cloud of forgetting, and in the mystical journey all stages are mutually inter-dependent; thus the creating aspect of God, like so many of the things which pertain most obviously to the early stages of the journey, may be under-emphasised, but it is not under-valued.

As the Father of mankind, God is depicted with great warmth and love, in very human imagery, despite his infinite power and strength, and for once the neo-Platonic Being seems abandoned, although the relationship is presented in a neo-Platonic framework, as a circular movement. The Christian forces of grace and love are the components of the relationship, but they work in a circular way, from God to man, and back to God; that is, God's love for man leads to the grace which enables man to love God and, ultimately, to return to him. God's love for man is rarely spoken of directly, for it is the great sine qua non of The Cloud. It is the reason for creation, the reason why God became man, and why he extends his grace to mankind, enabling them to approach him and eventually to achieve union with him. It finds expression in the most practical of ways, comforting those who are low, and always helping them. In two particularly warm passages the relationship is presented very much in terms of an earthly father and his child: '& this meeknes deserueth to have God himself mightely descendyng to venge thee of thine enemyes, for to take thee up & cherischingly drie thine goostly ighen, as

the fader doth the childe that is in poynte to perische under the
 mouthes of wilde swyne or wode bityng beres'.²⁰ 'Bot I trowe
 who-so had grace to do & fele as I sey, he schuld fele good
 gamesumli pley with him, as the fadir doth with the childe,
 kyissyng & clippyng, that weel were him so.'²¹

The importance of grace in The Cloud cannot be
 over-emphasised. Clifton Walters has calculated that in the
 work, the word grace and its cognates appear over ninety times.²²
 Yet the doctrine is not a straightforward one. Indeed, the
 author seems to have problems with his understanding and
 presentation of grace, and very obvious tensions appear, between
 his desire on the one hand to present grace as prevenient,
 irresistible, indispensable, and on the other to present man in a
 fairly positive light, with the emphasis that he can and does
 prepare for grace and ultimately chooses to accept it. In other
 words, he cannot seem to choose between Augustinianism and
 semi-Pelagianism. Grace is certainly a remarkable force, capable
 of achieving much and helping men attain great goals, overcoming
 if not eradicating the consequences of original sin. It is
 active in all stages of the Christian life, calling men first to
 the ordinary life, thence to the special and solitary. 'For
 first thou wote wel that when thou were leuyng in the common
 degree of Cristen mens leuyng in companie of thi wordely
 freendes, it semeth to me that the euerlasting love of his
 Godheed, thorow the whiche he mad thee & wrought thee when thou
 were nought, & withen bought thee with the prise of his precious
 blood when thou were loste in Adam, might not suffre thee be so

fer fro him in forme & degree of leuyng. & therfore he kyndelid thi desire ful graciously, & fastnid bi it a lyame of longing, & led thee bi it in to a more special state & forme of leuyng ... Yit it semeth that he wolde not leue thee thus lightly ... Seest thou nought how lystly & how graciously he hath pulled thee to the thrid degre & maner of leuing ...²³ Grace is involved in good works, in meditation, in the work of putting all things in to the cloud of forgetting, and above all in the constant striving upwards towards the vision of God. In this way it is presented as a force in itself, not something which exists only within an already-established relationship between God and man. We cannot deduce whether, for the author, the gift of grace was something distinct from the giver, or whether, as for St. Augustine, the gift was the giver, that is, the Holy Spirit. Whichever, grace is an independent force, blowing where it will, 'For whi that is the werk of only God, specyaly wrought in what soule that hym likith, with-outyn any deseert of the same soule ... For neither it is ghouen for inocense, ne with-holden for synne'.²⁴ God alone acts, and men may only suffer his actions '& thus I vnderstonde this worde of the gospel ...' 'With-outyn me ye mowe do nothing' - on a maner in actyues & on another in contemplatyues.²⁵

Simultaneously, the author wishes to emphasise the contribution of man to the sanctifying process. There must be both readiness and preparation for grace, it cannot work on the individual who is unwilling to accept it: '& yit he geuith not this grace, ne worcheth this werke in ani soule that is vnable

thereto'.²⁶ Indeed; the very purpose of The Cloud and, to a lesser extent, the Epistle of Privy Counsel is to show just how much men can and must do if they are to achieve contemplative prayer. In the section on the understanding of man we will see how much the author accredits to man's faculties, and in particular the faculty of will. Here it need only be said that man is, to some extent, in control of his own destiny, and this is something which the author wishes to emphasise. The tension this creates when taken along with his desire to emphasise the importance of grace is more superficial than logical. In the end man's work, while important and necessary, is quite definitely secondary to God's grace. Nevertheless, it is obviously quite hard work to juggle these two emphases successfully; the difficulty seems to be encapsulated in the injunction: '& therefore lift up thi love to that cloude. Bot if I schal sey the sothe, lat God drawe thi love up to that cloude; & proue thou thorou help of his grace to forgete alle other thing'.²⁷ In trying to sit on a theological fence, the author undoubtedly loses some of his usual clarity and forthrightness.

Moving on to the question of election and predestination, a certain amount of pre-supposition and hopefully informed guess work must come into play if we are to conclude anything. There are certainly no tendencies towards universalism, but again there is nothing of Augustine's unappealing double-predestination; perhaps this was a sticky point which he preferred to leave well along. Orthodoxly of course, he believed that Jesus died for all men, and in theory at least grace is available to all: 'For as

alle men woren lost in Adam, for he fel fro this onyng affeccion, & as alle, that with werk acordyng to here clepyng wol witnes here wille of saluacion, bon sauid & schul be by vertewe of the Passion of only Crist, offring him-self up in verriest sacrifighe, al that he was in general & not in specyal, with-outyn special beholdyng to any o man in this liif, bot generally & in comon for alle; right so a verey & a parfite sacrificier of himself thus by a comon entent vnto alle doth that in him is to knit alle men to God as effechiely as himself is'.²⁸

To deduce whether he thought this hope would be fulfilled we must turn to his attitude to the grace of contemplation, and here a certain amount of elitism and, possibly, by implication, predestination, is apparent. For he is very clear on the point that not all will be called to contemplation, in fact only a very few are chosen to come so close to God; 'Alle thoo that redyn or heren the mater of this book be red or spokin, & in this redyng or hering think it good & likyng thing, ben never the rather clepid of God to worche in this werk ...'²⁹ We might infer from this that, since not all are called to become contemplatives, some may not even be called to become ordinary Christians in the first place. Of course, it is a very long way from this to an actual doctrine of predestination, and the most that can be said is that in such an orthodox writer with an elitist view of the contemplative life it would be unusual to find any universalism.

Moving on we come to the relationship between 'ordinary' grace and the grace of contemplation. This is a constant area of debate among students of mysticism, and the question is always,

are the two different in kind, or merely in degree. One could not hope to find all mystics agreed on this point, but perhaps the issue is made more complicated than it need be. In The Cloud there is a strong sense of unbroken progression and development. One is called from the life of ordinary grace through special to solitary, and finally to the grace of contemplation; the development is always seen as a smooth and natural one, and there is interaction between the two types of life. For each life consists of two parts, an upper and a lower, and the upper part of the active life is the same as the lower part of the contemplative. Thus, there is a 'grey' area, where active and contemplative meet. Not only this, but on occasion the contemplative may even descend to the first part of the active life, and the meditating active reach higher into the prayer of contemplation: 'Thus highe may an actyve come to contemplacion, & no higher; bot if it be ful seeldom & by a specyal grace. Thus lowe may a contemplatif com towardes actyve liif, & no lower; bot if it be ful seeldom & in grete nede'.³⁰ Rare occasions, perhaps, but their possibility exists, blurring further the lines between the active and contemplative. While the true contemplative, involved in the third part, or perfect life, is himself quite removed from the active life, yet the contemplative life has its connections with the active. Therefore, if one wished to suggest that the grace of contemplation is quite different in kind from the grace which sanctifies the ordinary Christian, it would be difficult to say at what point it touches the individual and removes him from the ordinary development of

sanctification. It would be to suggest a break in the process which would lose that unity of the Christian life, through active to contemplative, which is so important in The Cloud.

Furthermore, throughout the earthly life, grace acts in the same way, assuring the individual of God's love, and showing this love in practical ways, helping guard against the evils of the world, temptation and trial, giving comfort when needed, granting patience and strength and the ability to put away the things of the world, and wait for God in rest and quiet. This grace does for the active as well as the contemplative; and it seems improbable at least that two different kinds of grace would work in such similar ways. The grace which touches the contemplative in the early stages of his religious life is the same as that which touches the ordinary Christian throughout his, and there seems to be no point at which a break could occur and a different kind of grace take over. There is no doubt that contemplatives are especially beloved and chosen, accorded a special honour, and equally no doubt that not all could advance as far as this, being neither chosen, nor suitable in themselves. It might appear that sanctifying grace and contemplative grace are so very different in degree that they might as well be different in kind; the individual who bustles about doing good works is in so different a sphere from the one who spends his time in pure contemplation of God that it is easy to believe that it is not the same grace which works in both of them. But it is the same grace, and to suggest otherwise would be to lose the unity of The Cloud.

Finally, we must look briefly at the apparently Thomist view

of nature and grace which appears in The Cloud. This was something evidently quite important to the author, unusually so, perhaps, given the relative unimportance of St. Thomas in England at this time. In two places, the formula is applied to the attainment of the beatific vision: 'Abouen thi-self thou arte: for whi thou atteynest to come thedir by grace, whether thou mayst not come by kynde; that is to sey, to be onyd to God in spirit & in love & in accordaunce of wille'.³¹ 'For Criste gede before bi kynde, & we comyn after bi grace. His kynde is more worthi then grace, & grace is more worthi then oure kynde'.³² Whether the author is strictly Thomist, that is, viewing grace as doing only what nature cannot, is less clear. He may well have more place for grace, along a broader scale, than traditional Thomism allowed for.

We have looked at two aspects of the Father/man relationship, and the third, the love of man for God his Father, which completes the circle, will be examined below. Thus far it is a very 'human' relationship, where love not fear is the motivation. There is an element of fear in the relationship, as described in the Epistle of Prayer, 'loke thou gete thee in thi beginnyng this verrey worching of drede; for, as the same prophete seith in another psalme: 'Inicium sapiente est timor Domini': that is: The beginnyng of wisdom is drede of oure Lorde God'.³³ The emphasis is on the beginning. Fear is necessary to bring one to the proper respect for God, and awareness of one's own weakness and helplessness; but on its own it is a negative factor, and must be coupled with the knowledge of God's mercy and

forgiveness which is granted to all who repent. Together these two, fear and hope, are a help to the man who climbs higher towards God, and they lead him towards that feeling which is most important of all, the feeling of love. For the author these three are inextricably linked: 'For whi, reuerence is not elles bot drede and love medelid togeders with a staf of certein hope'.³⁴ But by the time the high level of The Cloud is reached, the need to discuss fear is gone, replaced instead by emphasis on pure, whole-hearted love, and this is seen most strikingly in the author's attitude to Judgement Day. The picture of God as a figure of justice is the least loveable, and while in theory justice is tempered with mercy, the common understanding tends to forget this as threats are uttered of unrepentant sinners being condemned to suffer in eternity. In The Cloud this belief is still held to; Judgement Day is a strong reality to the author: 'For I trowe & alle soche heretikes, & alle theire fautours, & thei might cleerly be seen as thei scholen on the last day, schuld be sene ful sone kumbrid in grete & horryble synnes of the worlde & theire foule flessche priuely, with-uten theire apeerte presumpcion in meyntenying of errour. So that thei ben ful properly clepid Antecriste discyples; for it is seide of hem that for alle theire fals fare in aperte, yet thei schul be ful foule lechors priuely'.³⁵ But more interestingly, and more in character with the warm and loving atmosphere of The Cloud is the opinion that Judgement Day will be a day of great rejoicing: 'Now trewly I hope that on Domesday schal be fayre, when that God schal be seen cleerly & alle his giftes. Thanne schal somme that

now ben dyspysid & sette at lytil or nought as comon synners, & paraventure somme that now ben horrible synners, sitte ful seemly with seyntes in his sight'.³⁶ Thus, even in the picture of God as Judge the elements of love and grace are dominant, in keeping with the whole representation of God the Father as a very loving and understanding one, yet fair and just, not over-indulgent; the perfect model, indeed, for the earthly father.

On the issue of the Christology of The Cloud, there has been a recent challenge to the hitherto accepted formula that The Cloud does not belong to the Christocentric mystical tradition of which St. Bernard, a recognised source for the anonymous writer, was so great a leader. In his introduction to his edition of The Cloud Fr. William Johnston claims that The Cloud is truly a Christocentric work,³⁷ but while some of his observations are accurate, he perhaps goes too far in his attempt to redress the balance; when everything is taken into account the term 'Christocentric' is really no more adequate than the more commonly applied 'theocentric'. The description of The Cloud as a work of Trinitarian mysticism is more appropriate than either of these. For while supporters of the label 'theocentric' will find some evidence in the number of times the word God is used, in comparison with the fewer references to Jesus Christ, yet the value placed by the author on the work of the Son is by no means in direct proportion to the number of references to his name. On the contrary, his role is examined fully, and his contribution to the contemplative's search for God is acknowledged for what it is

- essential, as a part of the work of the whole Trinity. The restrained yet wholly respectful attitude which the author takes towards the person of the Son is perhaps best exemplified by his obvious stance with regard to the cult of devotion to the Holy Name. His contemporaries, including Walter Hilton, were deeply involved with this; but the author of The Cloud, while aware of and sympathetic to the cult, refuses to go overboard about it, and there is only one oblique reference to it: 'I sey not this for I wil that thou leue any tyme, if thou be stirid for to preie with thi mouth, or for to brest oute, for habundaunce of deuocion in thi spirit, for to speke vnto God as vnto man, & sey som good worde as thou felist thee sterid, as ben thees: 'Good Ihesu! Faire Ihesu! Swete Ihesu!' & alle thees other. Nay, God forbede thou take it thus!'³⁸

As we might anticipate, a complete picture of the work of Christ is presented, taking fully into account the dual nature of the Son, fully God and fully man. The author was thoroughly Chalcedonian in his Christology, confining his speculations to the limits of orthodoxy: 'For how-so his body is in heuen-standyng, sittynge, or liggynge - wote no man. & it nedith not to be wetyn'.³⁹ He seems to have had no difficulties in conceiving of two natures in one person, and always presents the two aspects, divine and human, side by side: '& in heryng of his worde, sche beheeld not to the besines of hir sister ... bot to the souereynest wisdom of his Godheed lapped in the derk wordes of his Manheed'.⁴⁰ 'It is a merueillous housholde, goostlines, for whi the Lorde is not only portour hym-self, bot also he is

the dore; the porter he is bi his Godheed, & the dore he is by his manheed'.⁴¹ For the author, the Son is always Jesus Christ, and neither nature should be over-emphasised to the detriment of the other, for it is the two natures in one that form his essence. If we ignore his humanity, the value of his divinity is undermined, and vice-versa. Thus, although we may search in vain for references to the pre-existence of Christ, it has to be assumed, for the Son is an equal member of the Trinity. Indeed, we have already seen how the emphasis throughout is on the self-determination of the Son, the choice of the Triune God to become man. So the author refers to 'the goodnes of his Godheed, in the whiche he voucheth-saaf to meke hym so lowe in oure deedly manheed'.⁴²

Having thus chosen to become man and come down to earth, what of the achievement of the Son among mortals? There is no indication of a particular notion of the Atonement. In one reference to the saving work of Christ⁴³ the ransom theory which had so dominated the early Middle Ages seems to be implied, but this is by no means certain; for the author does not say to whom the price was paid; it might have been God, or it might have been the devil, each of which would imply a quite different belief. There is also reference to the sacrifice of Christ, although there is nothing elsewhere to suggest that the author held to the sacrificial theory proper. On the other hand, the general timbre of The Cloud with its emphasis on the power of love, the grace and justice of God extended for the succour of mankind, does suggest that the author's inclinations might be towards the

dramatic theory, perhaps in conjunction with something of Anselm's satisfaction. It is certain, at least, that with his scholarly, eclectic approach he would be unlikely to adopt wholesale one theory, if he saw it could be improved with emendations and additions; and it can safely be said that this is true of most theories of the atonement.

On the value of the work of the Son the author is less reticent. Through his sacrifice and passion, the calamitous effects of original sin, the Fall and the separation of mankind from God, are overcome, and the pathway from God to man made clear again. 'For as alle men weren lost in Adam, for he fel fro this onyng affeccion, & as alle, that with werk acordyng to here clepyng wol witnes here wille of saluacion, ben sauid & schul be by the vertewe of the Passion of only Crist, offrng him-self up in verreiest sacrifiche al that he was in general & not in specyall, with-outyn special beholding to any o man in this liif, bot generally & in comon for alle, right so a verey & a parfite sacrificer of him-self thus by a comon entent vnto alle doth that in him is to knit alle men to God as effechiely as himself is'.⁴⁴ Clearly there is no salvation save through the sacrifice and sufferings of God the Son. Without him man would be lost forever, and there would certainly be no question of the contemplative and the search for union with God, were it not for the decision of the Trinity to become man in the person of the Son.

The direct outcome of this work, the healing of the broken relationship between God and man, is that Christ continues to

occupy a very special place in this relationship. This is clearly seen in his position in the church, which will be discussed below, and also in the private spiritual life of each individual, as the sanctifying grace carries on. Christ helps the believer in all stages of the Christian life, and in many ways. We have seen how the author always presents us with both sides of the Son's person, divine and human, and if the atoning work is that of the divine, then it is the life of the man, Jesus, which is so important at this point. He is both example and encouragement, and illustration, throughout his life and in all his good works, of the miraculous, healing effect of God upon the soul. He encourages actives in their good works, for 'who-so clotheth a pore man & doth any other good deed for Goddes love, bodily or goostly, to any that hath need, sekir be thei thei do it vnto Criste goostly, & thei schul be rewardid as substancyaly perfore as thei had done it to Criste's owne body'.⁴⁵

Further up the scale, among the actives of the higher order, we find that Christ's life and passion are of considerable value as objects of meditation: 'what man or womman that wenith to come to contemplacion with-outyn many soche swete meditacions of theire owne wrechidnes, the Passion, the kyndenes & the grete goodnes & the worthines of God comyng before, sekirly he schal erre & faile of his purpose'.⁴⁶ So the life and sacrifice of Christ seems to work in a three-dimensional way. First, the simple fact of it has opened the way between man and God. Secondly, awareness of his great goodness encourages ordinary,

active Christians to perform good works, and also enables them to see something more of the great love of God for man. Thirdly, those who have reached the meditative stage may, through meditation on Christ, and his sufferings and love, understand more profoundly what has been done for them, receive a vague impression of what delights await them further on, and grow to love God more whole-heartedly, and strive harder in their search for him.

When we come to the final stage of the Christian life, we see Christ working in a quite different way. In contemplative prayer, concentrating the mind on the work of Christ is no longer of any benefit, this whole approach must be put behind. There are still some areas where Christ's life serves as a useful example; as, when the author wishes to explain that things spiritual should not be understood literally, he uses the example of Christ's ascension, where it is simply more suitable that Christ be seen to go upwards, and it is not a necessary physical move.⁴⁷ But this sort of exemplary work is rare; far more important is the way Christ works directly on the contemplative's soul.

Here, it may be difficult to distinguish between Christ's role, and the work of God; an example, indeed, of what was stated above, that the work of one member of the Trinity is ultimately the work of the whole Trinity, and in places the choice of name - Father, Son, or Spirit - may seem almost arbitrary. On more than one occasion, we are told that Christ actually calls contemplatives: 'To this perfeccion, & alle other, oure Lorde

Ihesu Criste clepith us him-self in the Gospel, where he biddeth that we schuld be parfite by grace as he hym-self is by kynde'.⁴⁸

'& in this he lateth us wetyn fully that we mowen on no wise folow hym to the mounte of perfeccion, as it fallith to be the vse of this werk, bot if it be only sterid & led by grace'.⁴⁹

And yet, as we have already seen in the early chapters of The Cloud it is God who calls the individual up towards him, through the various stages of life. Here, God and Christ are one; and it may have been the author's intention to emphasise thus that all persons in the Trinity are involved in the call to contemplation.

As well as choosing and calling his contemplatives, Christ takes care of and protects them throughout their lives. In his life on earth he showed his responsibility towards his contemplatives when he defended Mary against Martha's verbal attack: 'as an aduoket lawfully defendid hir that hym loued'.⁵⁰ And contemplatives now may be assured that he will protect them too against any such criticisms: '& therfore lat the voice of oure Lorde crie on theese actyues, as if he seide thus now for us vnto hem, as he did then for Marye to Martha'.⁵¹ His support and aid is not restricted to this very earthly problem; in the realm of the spiritual, when the contemplative suffers in darkness, trying desperately to overcome his awareness of his own being, which acts as an insuperable barrier in his search for God, Jesus comes to his aid: 'Jhesu help thee thanne, for than hast thou neede'.⁵² This is what Jesus meant when he declared that all who would follow him must take up their cross to do so; but he also promised that they would follow him to the delight of direct

experience of his being, and so again the historical figure of Jesus Christ and his words in the gospel have a direct bearing on the contemplative life.

The third way in which Christ acts in the contemplative's life is in the actual prayer of contemplation. The author states that 'the grace of Jhesu ... is the cheef worcher'.⁵³ This does not mean he believed that Jesus always acts as mediator and there is no possibility of direct experience of the Godhead by man; rather this is another example of how closely the author saw the persons of the Trinity inter-acting. Certainly, there is no salvation without the work of Christ, and this working grace carries on to the very upper reaches of the Christian life, so that in contemplation as in good works, nothing would be possible without Christ. But Christ is so essentially a part of the Trinity that he could never act other than as a part of the Trinity. Therefore, union with him is union with the Godhead.

In conclusion, the author's depiction of Christ has three main characteristics. First, and most important, the Son is an equal member of the Trinity, his work is God's work and without him no salvation would be possible, and thus no perfection. Second, his earthly life is an example to all Christians, ordinary and contemplative alike, so that what the contemplative is seeking is to become by grace what Christ was by nature.⁵⁴ Third, in this attempt Christ is always keeping guard to help and comfort, closer seeming perhaps, because of his experience, than the Father who guides and directs 'from above'. Thus in The Cloud the work of the historical Jesus and the eternal Word are

blended so completely that the orthodox doctrine to which the author clung is made to appear, by his skill, both natural, logical, and comprehensible - a considerable achievement given the complexity of the two-natures-in-one doctrine.

In contrast to the crucial work of Christ in the spiritual life, it might appear, on the surface, that comparatively little value is accorded to the work of the Holy Spirit, a rather odd characteristic of a work such as The Cloud where it might reasonably be expected that the inspiring and sustaining work of the Spirit would be central to all the contemplative's hopes and aspirations. The reason for the anomaly is not hard to find. Unlike the Father and the Son, whose creating and redeeming work may be said to pertain exclusively to them, (in so far as any work of the Trinity may be said to pertain exclusively to one member of it) the Holy Spirit cannot claim to such a definite historical, once-for-all achievement. His work is essentially on-going, and in this on-going work the Father and Son also participate. Thus we have seen the Father caring for his children throughout their lives, and the Son urging his followers to tread the path he trod towards the mount of perfection. So, even while it must be said that as an equal member of the Trinity the Holy Spirit was involved in the creating work of the Father, and the redemptive work of the Son, yet these two impinge much more obviously on what is traditionally the domain of the Spirit.

Accordingly, references to the Spirit are few; but where they come they show a traditional understanding of his role and

work. In The Cloud the first reference to the Spirit in history is the coming at Pentecost, or more accurately, being sent: 'for Criste assendid thedir bodely upwardes, & sente the Holy Goost'.⁵⁵ We have already noted how, significantly, the Son chooses to come to earth, and to ascend, emphasising the self-determination of this member of the Trinity. The Spirit is not accorded this ability, but sent to Earth, not simply by the Father but, very clearly in this instance, by the Son; indicative of the author's orthodox adherence to the filioque clause.

There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit is an active force in those whom God chooses as his contemplatives, in stirring their hearts to love, and this is a sure sign that the individual is chosen by God: '& namely, ever to he be clepid innermore bi the priue teching of the Spirit of God, whiche techyng is the rediest & the sekirest witnes that may be had in this liif of the clepyng & the drawyng of a soule innermore to more special worching of grace'.⁵⁶ Some would-be contemplatives may fool themselves into thinking that they have been touched by the Holy Spirit: 'And yit paraenture, thei weine it to be the fiir of loue, getyn & kyndelid by the grace & the goodness of the Holy Goost'.⁵⁷ The Spirit thus grants to men the ability to love God whole-heartedly, as is essential for the contemplative; and there is also an indication that he grants other powers, for example the right to judge other men: 'But I preye thee, of whom schal mens dedis to demyd? Sekirly of hem that han power & cure of theire soules ... priuely in spirite at the specyal steryng of the Holy Goost in parfite charite'.⁵⁸ The Spirit also guides and

directs men as they progress through the contemplative life, one very important contribution being as the means by which individuals can tell if they are being touched by God, or if the devil is attempting to deceive them and lead them into error, falsehood and sin. Thus, if one tends to receive spiritual comforts, those strange experiences and sensations which were so important to the author's near-contemporary Rolle (and it seems almost certain that it was against Rolle's emphasis on such things that the author was warning⁵⁹) then one should always be suspicious of them until they are proven to be genuinely from God; if they are, the Holy Spirit will give this assurance, beyond any doubt - although he is not the sole source of this guidance, as the spiritual director will also give advice.

The acknowledged powers of the Holy Spirit are extremely practical; he stirs the contemplative to love, helps him to discern what comes from God and what from the devil. There are, however, no references to his love upholding the contemplative in his dark hours of need, as the Son and the Father do. The author was not simply paying lip service to the Spirit, rather the very nature of the work of the Spirit means a superficially scanty treatment, and is a direct result of the author's view of the Trinity as essentially one. Moreover, the secret work of the Holy Spirit is looked at from another angle when grace and love are spoken of - which they so frequently are. Throughout The Cloud the author prefers to use the term 'God', where possible, instead of 'Father', 'Son', or 'Spirit', thus emphasising that the whole Trinity is always at work, behind every action of each

particular member. In places, however, it might lead to confusion and inaccuracy were this to be applied, and so in references to the Atonement, or the life of God incarnate, the name Jesus Christ must be used; similarly with references to the relationship between God as Father, and his earthly sons, men. But in the work of the Holy Spirit no such problem arises, for this is an eternal process, carried on in the spirit, it is God as process rather than act. Therefore, while we do find references to the Spirit choosing men, calling them, touching them, far more numerous are the references to God performing these tasks: 'Bot in thinges contemplatyue the heighest wisdom that may be in man (as man) is fer put vnder, that God be the principal in worching ...'⁶⁰ '& sith so is that God of his goodnes sterith & touchith diuerse soulis diuersly ...'⁶¹ Because in all such references the author may use the word God, meaning Godhead, without any confusion of meaning or apparent loss of accuracy by traditional standards, he prefers to do so, for in this way he can emphasise what was very dear to his heart, namely that the Trinity will always work together, and in each action of each member, it is the Godhead that is truly active. It cannot be denied that as a direct result of this there is a noticeable lack of overt reference to the Holy Spirit. This is compounded by the very nature of the work of the Holy Spirit, eternal and secret. Nevertheless, grace and love, the gifts of the Spirit, are the very essence of the contemplative life and, superficial evidence notwithstanding, we must affirm again the equality of the Trinity; for, if there is any apparent

subordination of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, it is in the economic Trinity, not the essential, which remains inviolably three in one.

In The Cloud the author is concerned not only with the Trinity, but also with the entity which seeks union with the Trinity, the contemplative man. And since the contemplative is not a being completely distinct from ordinary men; for, though chosen by God in a special way, and the recipient of a special degree of grace, he is in the beginning as all others, it is appropriate to look at the author's view of man, although this may involve a certain amount of repetition of matters already discussed. On the whole, he has a positive view of man, after all, a being capable of union with the Godhead must have some fairly positive qualities; while lower than God, men are higher than all other created beings. At the same time, the author is fully aware of men's weaknessess, stemming from the weakness of the original man, and of how wholly dependent they are on God's actions, God's grace; and thus a balance is always maintained.

The initial emphasis is on the great gulf between God and man, which must always remain because of the fact that God is uncreated Being, and man his creature 'euermore sauynge this difference betwix thee & him, that he is thi being & thou not his. For thogh it be so that alle thinges ben in hym bi cause & bi beyng & he be in alle thinges here cause & here being, yit in him-self only he is his owne cause & his owne being'.⁶² Yet, as we have already seen, the author had a reverence for all creation

as the work of God, and mankind is undoubtedly the piece de resistance of that work, made as he is in the image of God: '& oure soule euen mete unto him bi worthines of oure creacion to his ymage & to his licles'.⁶³ Initially, man's powers were great, he was close to God, his natural and rightful place, and he could choose and do only good, he was unable to sin. But this closeness was destroyed by one act of disobedience, and this has had devastating effects on mankind throughout history, its consequences both many and eternal. However, as with the teaching of The Cloud on grace, so with the presentation of original sin there is a small degree of tension. At one moment, the author is clear on the permanent and ineradicable effects of original sin. Baptism cleanses the individual of the guilt of original sin, but nothing can rid man of its effects: 'the pyne of the original synne ... schal always last on thee to thi deeth day, be thou neuer so besi'.⁶⁴ This, however, does not sit happily with the view earlier expressed that the contemplative work can destroy the ground of sin: 'For this is only bi it-self that werk that distroieeth the groudne & the rote of synne'.⁶⁵ These two views do not directly contradict, but nor do they complement each other.

The worst effect of original sin is that the soul is separated from God: '& the whiles that a soule is wonying in this deedly flesche, it schal euermore se & fele this combros cloude of vnknowing betwix him & God. & not only that, bot in pyne of the original sinne it schal euermore see & fele that somme of alle the creatures that euer God maad, or somme of their werkes,

wilen euermore prees in mynde betwix him & God'.⁶⁶

Secondly, man lost his inability to sin, and his faculties were perverted and cursed with the ability to choose evil. The author discusses this aspect at length, and with greater use of scholastic language than elsewhere. The stamp of St. Augustine is very evident, in the admittedly common division of man's spirit into different faculties. There are five faculties, three of which are primary and two secondary. The three primary are mind - which does not actually do any work, rather it includes the other faculties - reason, and will, which pertain to matters spiritual and are independent of the body. The two secondary, imagination and sensuality, pertain to the material world and are dependent on the work of the five senses. Original sin has grossly affected the work of the faculties. 'Reason is a myght thorou the wiche we departe the iuel fro the good, the iuel fro the worse, the good fro the betir, the worse fro the worste, the betir fro the beste. Before er man synned, might reson haue done al this by kynde. Bot now it is so blendid with the original synne that it mya not konne worche this werk bot if it be illuminid by grace'.⁶⁷ The work of the will is to move towards what reason presents as good; it could be argued that in The Cloud the will itself is essentially unaffected by original sin, in that it still moves towards what reason presents as good, even when reason is wrong. But it becomes clear that this was a nuance of meaning the author did not want, even if he were aware of it, and, despite the primacy of the will, grace is required here as with the other faculties. Before original sin,

imagination reflected everything just as it was. Now, distorted views of reality, both material and spiritual, are a very common danger, particularly for the contemplative. The perversion of sensuality has led to desire for excesses which, in the contemplative life, is countered by discretion.

The direct result of this perversion of man's faculties is the third consequence of original sin, that is, the tendency to sin elsewhere: 'For oute of this original synne wil alday sprynge newe & fresche sterynges of synne'.⁶⁸ It is worthy of remark that in The Cloud, if sin is not quite all in the mind, the state of mind has a great deal to do with it. An act on its own need not be sinful, rather it is the state of mind of the person who commits the act which makes it so; it is the consent to sin of which one is guilty: 'than at the last it is fastnid to the goostly herte (that is to sey the wile) with a ful consent: than it is deedly synne'.⁶⁹ In declaring that the inclination to sin is the effect of original sin, the author affirms both that sin is entirely the responsibility of the individual, and also that sin is unavoidable, being handed down by generation. The author holds to the orthodox distinction between mortal and venial sin, and also treats the reader to a brief discourse on the seven deadly sins, where again the attitude of mind is the determining factor. Thus gluttony is not defined merely as over-eating, but as thinking about over-eating.⁷⁹ In this the author shows his adherence to the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

The effects of original sin are thus manifold and dread, and the author does not believe in making light of them. The burden

is a terrible one, and must always remain with one. The 'lump' of sin from I Corinthians is clearly felt to be an appropriate metaphor, for it is used frequently: 'Me thinks that in this blynde beholdyng of synne, thus conielyd in a lumpe (none other thing than thi-self ...)'⁷¹ '& no wonder thof thou lothe & hate for to think on thi-self, when thou schalt alweis fele synne a foule stynkyng lumpe, thou wost neuer what, betwix thee & thi God'.⁷² Sin is inescapable, it dogs all men, even contemplatives far advanced in the spiritual life. But the author gives no hint of how he believes sin is transmitted, and accordingly at what stage in life the individual is first affected by it. He simply makes it clear that the consequences of original sin affect all equally, irrespective of the individual's personal merits, as a sort of unavoidable doom.

However, from this somewhat negative stance the author shifts ground rather, to claim a certain degree of self-determination for men, in the issue of grace, the means of overcoming if not eradicating original sin. The author believes that the will is affected as are the other faculties by original sin, even if in some places his account leads to a certain ambivalence; yet a considerable amount of optimism remains. For while men may now choose evil, they may also choose God. Thus they may choose to accept the grace which enables the will to return to something of its pre-lapsarian state: 'Before er man synnid, might not wille be disceyuid in his chesyng, in his louyng, ne in none of his werkes; for whi it had than by kynde to savour iche thing as it was. Bot now it may not do so, bot if it

be anointed with grace'.⁷³ Men are unable to love God whole-heartedly unless touched by grace; but the important point for us is that they do actually make a response to grace: '& yit he gheuith not this grace, no worcheth not this werk, in ani soule, that is vnable therto'.⁷⁴ So, while the individual cannot do anything to escape original sin, he is at least left with the freedom to choose or reject the grace which God's love causes to be extended towards him.

Having chosen to accept God's grace, the individual is drawn into the Christian life, and he may either remain in the ordinary life, as an active, or be drawn further, by grace, into the contemplative life. As we know, while the author's sympathies and interests really lie with the contemplatives, he acknowledges the great worth of the active Christians, and sees the hand of God in their lives as in the contemplative. He is the reason for and cause of their good works: 'For thei that ben actyves behouen alweis to be besied & trauaylid aboute many diverse thinges, the whiche hem falleth first for to have to here owne vse, & sithen in dedes of mercy to theire euen Cristen, as charite asketh'.⁷⁵ The value of Martha's work is acknowledged, and should not be seen as being discredited by the statement that it is yet not as valuable as Mary's.

Yet, anything actives can do, contemplatives can do much better, and so while works of charity are accredited to actives, contemplatives actually achieve a much higher degree of charity, for their work, seemingly self-centred and self-absorbed, does much more good for all men than any amount of physical good

works, or even intercessory prayer. The reason for this is not hard to find; for anything pertaining to God is of a higher degree than anything pertaining to man. Imperfect humility is grounded in awareness of one's own wretchedness; perfect humility is grounded in God's love and perfection.⁷⁶ The contemplative is wholly absorbed in God, whose grace has kindled in him a powerful love of God, and so the circle mentioned earlier is completed, the circle which begins with God, and his love for men, the grace he touches them with, and then the love of men for God, which leads them back to unity with him. This love is the one essential element in the contemplative's search. Meditation is here to no avail, and asceticism is equally irrelevant: 'Fast thou neuer so moche, wake thou neuer so longe, rise thou neuer so eerly, ligge thou neuer so harde, were thou neuer so scharp, ye, & if it were leueful to do - as it is not-puttest thou oute thin yghen, cuttest thou oute thi tonge of thi mouth, stoppedst thou thin eren & thi nose neuer so fast, though thou schere awei thi preue membres & dedest al the pine to thi body that thou mightest think: alle this wolde help thee right nought'.⁷⁷

The Cloud is a long way from St. Francis of Assisi.

Only love is required of the contemplative - but it is a very demanding love. It completely takes over the whole self, which allows itself to be distracted by nothing, but concentrates wholly and simply on the one thing, the Godhead. Not even love for God as personified in Jesus Christ must get in the way. Such a demanding love is obviously a rather uncomfortable thing at times, and there is struggle and pain involved all along the way,

times of darkness and loss, although the emphasis throughout is on the positive. The darkest and most terrible time comes when the last thing is put into the cloud of forgetting, awareness of one's self, yet this must happen, 'For it is the condicion of a parfite lover not only to love that thing that he loueth more then him-self, bot also in maner for to hate him-self for that thing that he louith'.⁷⁸ Again the co-operation between God's grace and the individual is essential if this seemingly impossible task is to be achieved, for only self can forget self, and that only through a great deal of concentration, and suffering. God is comfort and strength throughout the darker stages of the contemplative's loving journey towards him, lightening the load where possible and appropriate. Many might give up in despair for, as well as being a totally demanding love, it is one which of necessity can never be satisfied in this life. So to those who need them, God grants spiritual consolations: '& som ther ben that thei ben so weike in body that thei mowe do no grete penance to clense hem with, & thees creatures wil oure Lorde clense ful gracyously in spirit by soche swete felynges & wepynges'.⁷⁹ But it must be understood that such things are designed as an aid to the weak, not a reward for the successful. The luckiest ones are those who have no need of such things.

All, however, may be granted foretastes of the joy that will be theirs, a ray of light piercing the dark cloud of unknowing: 'Than wil he sumtyme paraenture seend oute a beme of goostly light, peersyng this cloude of vnknowing that is betwix thee &

hym, & schewe thee sum of his priuete, the whiche man may not, ne kan not speke. Than schalt thou fele thine affecion enflaumid with the fire of his love, fer more then I kan telle thee, or may, or wile, at this tyme'.⁸⁰ The union towards which all of this is aimed is, above all else, the proper and natural end for these chosen contemplatives: 'At the first, I aske of thee what is perfeccion of mans soule & whiche ben the propirtees that fallyn to this perfeccion. I answere in thi persone, & I sey that perfeccion of mans soule is not elles bot a oneheed maad betwix God & it in parfite charitee. This perfeccion is so high & so pure in it-self, abouen the vnderstandyng of man, that it may not be knowen ne perceyuid in it-self'.⁸¹ Thus the author sums up the main characteristics of the mystical union as he understands it. It is a union of love, it is fitting and natural, a destiny no less than the destiny to suffer from Adam's sin. There is nothing here of the rapture and ecstasy found, for example, in Richard Rolle. Rather the emphasis is on the peaceful nature of the eternal union: 'And therfore whoso wol haue God contynouly wonying in him, and live in loue and in sight of the highe pees of the Godheed, the whiche is the highest & the best partye of contemplacion that may be had in this liif, be he besi night & day ...'.⁸² The union is clearly presented as union with the Trinity, the Godhead; the essence of man oned with the essence of God. This complete union of soul and God, yet with both elements somehow remaining distinctly two, has been described by mystical writers in all ages by use of the image of the spiritual marriage. The author of The Cloud also saw it as a

fairly appropriate metaphor. It appears not only in the Study of Wisdom⁸³ and in the Epistle of Prayer⁸⁴, but also in The Cloud itself: '& in-so-mochel thou schuldest be more meek & louyng to thi goostly spouse ...',⁸⁵ However, as with all images which pertain to the union, this one is of limited usefulness, one of its greatest dangers being to lead to over-literal understanding and therefore distortion. To avoid this danger, the author is most unforthcoming when it comes to the union, and the points he affirms most frequently are its ineffability, and the impossibility of achieving it in this life: 'Bot seker be thou that cleer sight schal neuer man haue in this liif'.⁸⁶ In doing this, he safeguards his own orthodoxy, although such statements do obviously express his own understanding of the union, which is achieved by absolute and undiverted love of God and the forgetting of all else, and takes place in darkness, beyond our understanding: '& herfore it was that Seynte Denis seyde: 'The moste goodly knowyng of God is that, the whiche is knowyn bi vnknowing'.⁸⁷

The doctrine of man which we find in The Cloud is, therefore, both realistic and optimistic. Original sin and its never-ending effects are taken most seriously, but over-riding this is the belief in the goodness of God in allowing men to approach him once again in love. While stressing that nothing can be done without God's action, the author's practical approach means he does not dwell on this, but rather leads him to emphasise the one thing men can do, which is to give up all thoughts of everything else and concentrate single-mindedly and

whole-heartedly on loving God, allowing grace to perfect nature in helping man transcend himself and be united with God.

In the author's attitude to the church, we find an example of his orthodoxy. It is a common misunderstanding of the mystical school that its followers do not see any need for the church organisation, but are happy to lead their spiritual life alone and out on a limb; but this is an even less fair criticism of the author of The Cloud than of many other mystics. The church is essential to the anonymous writer, not simply as the body of the faithful but also as a social, hierarchical institution. The phrases 'Holy Church' and 'All-holy Church' appear repeatedly. He rejects all those who consider themselves learned enough to dispute the traditional teaching of the church, thus indicating his conviction that contemplatives as all other Christians are bound to follow the church on all doctrinal matters: 'Somme ther ben that, thof al thei be not disceyued with this errour as it is sette here, yit for pride & coriouse of kyndely witte & letterly kunnyng leuith the common doctrine & the counsel of Holy Chirche & thees, with alle here fautours, lenyn over moche to theire owne knowyng'.⁸⁸ There is frequent reference to the laws and rites of the church, and also to the value of the set prayers of the church, and the contemplative's need to perform these: 'For thei that ben trewe worchers in this werk, thei worschip no preier so moche; & therefore thei do hem in the fourme & in the statute that thei ben ordeynd of holy faders before us'.⁸⁹ The author clearly held to a traditional

acceptance of the importance of the church, stressing the value he put on it, and his own orthodoxy as regards its teaching, to an extent unusual in a mystic. His horror of heresy, and charges of heresy, obviously underlies this.

He is not, however, so explicit when it actually comes to expounding his own doctrines of the church. He has nothing to say on the nature of the relationship between God as Father, and the church, no reference, for example, to the church as the body of the chosen. Traditionally, of course, it is Christ, God as Son, who is important in the church, and in The Cloud one typical analogy is used: 'right so is it goostly of alle the limes of Holy Chirche. For Crist is oure hede, & we ben the lymes, if we be in charite'.⁹⁰ In using this image, the author makes it clear that he sees the church as the institution wherein the sanctifying work of Christ is carried on, and to Christ, as the head, his followers must look. Striking by its omission is the image of the church as the bride of Christ, and references to the church as a spiritual institution as opposed to a social one, are practically non-existent. The reasons for this emphasis are not hard to find. In the first place, the author is addressing himself to solitary contemplatives, his concern is not with the church as the body of the faithful, but with the individual soul; hence all references to the work of the Spirit are in the context of the individual, not the church. Yet at the same time, the author wishes to emphasise his orthodoxy, and the orthodoxy of mysticism in general, by showing his obedience to the laws, rites, customs and doctrine of the church. In consequence a

picture of the church emerges which is really rather unexpected in a work of spirituality.

Very much connected with his view of the church is the author's attitude to the priesthood. Again, the mediating activity of the priest, his role of authority, is something which is played down by many mystics, and in the more outrageous sects the idea of a separate, ordained priesthood was entirely abandoned. With such a school, however, the author of The Cloud had no truck, and it is, on the contrary, very evident that he held the priesthood in great esteem. He had a very strong notion of authority, evidenced not only by his attitude to and representation of the church, but also in his upholding of the notion of a spiritual director, something he believed in very strongly; obviously enough, as both The Cloud and the Epistle of Privy Counsel were written for a young contemplative whose spiritual director he was, and there are references throughout to the importance of the spiritual director.⁹¹ Nowhere does he state that such a spiritual adviser must be an ordained priest, but given the context it may be fairly safely assumed. The author appears very much as a church oriented man; as we will see, his attitude to the sacraments bears this out, and in addition it seems almost certain that he was himself a priest. It is also obvious that he had some involvement with an order.

Thus, we do not have a devout but eccentric individual with a vision of a direct line to God, without need of any intermediary on earth; the author was most emphatically not a mystic of the same type as the Desert Fathers, or Richard Rolle,

but a man whose place was very definitely within the church. As a priest, the administration of the sacraments was the most important part of his calling, as a monk his whole life centred around the office. We certainly do not find his ideas on the priesthood set out clearly and fully, and again we would not expect to. But what does emerge is a strong sense of the importance of the priesthood, and a hint that they have been especially marked by God via the church: 'But, I preye thee, of whom schal mens dedis be demyd? Sekirly of hem that han power & cure of theire soules, other euen in aperte by the statute & the ordinaunce of Holy Chirche in parfite charite'.⁹²

The same approach is found in the author's treatment of the sacramental life. References are scarce, and scant, but clear. Of the seven sacraments only two are alluded to, baptism and penance. There is but one reference to baptism: 'the pyne of the original sinne ..., of the whiche sinne thou arte clensid in thi baptyme ..'⁹³ On the subject of penance, the author has rather more to say. He repeatedly stresses that before the contemplative can embark on his mystical journey, he must go through the rite of penance as prescribed by the church: 'But if thou aske me when thei schulen wirche in this werk, then I answeere thee, & I sey that not er thei have clensid theire concience of alle theire special dedis of sinne done bifore, after the ordinaunce of Holi Chirche'⁹⁴ 'thi connyng and thi concience, lawfulich amendid thee after the comoun ordinaunce of Holy Chirche in confession'.⁹⁵ This emphasis on confession, the cleansing of the conscience is natural in a mystical work, for it

is the first stage of the purgative way, the work of putting all things into the cloud of forgetting. There is of course no discussion of the sacrament, only statements of its importance to the contemplative, but once again these statements point to an orthodox understanding.

We cannot help, however, but find it intriguing that there is nowhere a reference to that most important of sacraments, the eucharist. The absence may easily be explained rationally: this is a work about contemplation and union and traditionally discussion of these does not include discussion on the eucharist. Nevertheless, there are very obvious parallels between communion, and union. In the first place, confession and absolution are necessary before both. Secondly, in receiving the sacrament man comes closer to God than at any other time, and this must recall the foreshadowings of the ultimate vision which the contemplative is granted from time to time. Why, then does the author not develop this? One possibility is that he feared, by doing so, he would blur the lines between the contemplative and the ordinary Christian; anyone may experience closeness in the moment of communion, whereas only very few approach God in contemplative prayer. The fact remains, though, that this is a strange omission. Nevertheless, we should not be misled into thinking that the author was in any way dismissive of this or any of the sacraments. He accepted and revered the teaching of the church in all matters, and believed in the importance of her rites for all, active and contemplative alike. The scant attention he pays to the sacraments in his treatise may be best explained by the fact that he was a priest writing to a young man who, if not

also a priest, was at least deeply involved in the life of the church. The sacraments thus formed an essential part of the life of each, and for one to emphasise their importance to the other would have been entirely superfluous. Even if there is not much overt reference, everything else attests to the author's belief in the fundamental importance of church, priesthood and sacraments, and with this we must be content.

Turning to the question of scripture, we find the author treating it as a primary authority; the fact that scripture declares something is sufficient proof of its truth: 'This is soth by witnes of Scripture ...'⁹⁶ Despite this profound respect for scripture, however, the works of the Cloud corpus are not peppered with scriptural quotation and reference, and, however the author sees scripture, he does not use it in the traditional medieval fashion, as a quarry of proof-texts. The reason for this lies in his dislike of academic snobbery and boasting, for he sees this practice as nothing other than the airing of knowledge and learning: 'For somtyme men thought it meeknes to say nought of theire owne hedes; bot if thei afermid it by Scripture & doctours wordes; & now it is turnid into corioustee & schewing of kunnyng'.⁹⁷

How, then, does the author use passages of scripture when they are inserted in his work? He does not specifically refer to the multiple meanings of scripture, yet it is safe to assume that he followed, in some form, the typically medieval three-level interpretation of scripture, variously described as historical, typical and moral, and literal, allegorical and spiritual.

Certainly, he uses the allegorical method to extract moral or spiritual meaning. However, he clearly did not think that all passages could be understood in all three ways, for he is very much against literal interpretation of certain parts of the Bible, as he shows in his prolonged discussion of the Ascension: '& therfore beware that thou conceyue not bodely that that is mente goostly, thof al it be spokyn in bodely wordes ...'⁹⁸ He believes that in such an instance literal interpretation can be misleading and potentially dangerous. He is not arguing against the essential truth of scripture, but rather against certain ways of understanding it.

Undoubtedly, in The Cloud the most important use of scripture is as allegory to provide information as to the behaviour of Christians, active and contemplative. Thus Mary and Martha become types of the active and the contemplative, and their story shows how dearly God holds his contemplatives; how they will be criticised by those who do not understand the value of their work, and how they should not be distracted by anything, even thoughts of past sins, or meditation on the humanity of Christ, but carry on in their whole-hearted devotion to God.⁹⁹ The experiences of Moses, Aaron and Bezaleel are used to show how differently men may achieve contemplation, some by grace alone, some by their own skill and hard work, assisted by grace, and others by the teaching and help of their fore-runners.¹⁰⁰ The allegorical treatment of the family of Jacob (which the author obviously regarded as highly valuable, as it appears in the Epistle of Privy Counsel, as well as in the Study of Wisdom, his

translation of Richard of St. Victor's Benjamin Minor) demonstrates how long it takes to achieve contemplation, and how all other things, including the power of reason, must die before this can take place. In this way, scripture is used to guide the contemplative, but it is used discerningly and sparingly, and allegories are never strained, as they can be so easily. The author's faith in the authority of scripture was obviously strong, but it should be remarked that his mystical doctrine was not biblical in its foundations, rather scripture was used to highlight the features of a mysticism worked out from a combination of other sources.

In one of these principal sources, Dionysius, we find elaborate discussion of the celestial hierarchy. However, for the author of The Cloud this was not relevant to his theme, and the most frequent references to angels are of the same nature as references to Mary and the saints, that is, they are mentioned as distractions for the contemplative from his concentration on God. He does not dismiss them; on the contrary they are clearly valuable as objects of meditation, but at this point they are not helpful.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, some sort of angelology may be deduced. Angels are the messengers of God, and the form or name they assume when sent reflects the message they bear.¹⁰² Angels are higher than men, because they can never feel human weakness: 'an aungel in heven ... never felid-ne schal fele-freeelte'.¹⁰³ Their virtue is much greater than that of men; but essentially they are men's equals: 'Alle aungelles & alle soules, thof al thei be conformed & anowrnid with grace & with vertewes, for the

whiche thei ben abouen thee in clennes, neuertheles yit thei ben bot euen with thee in kynde'.¹⁰⁴ Like men, angels have two main powers of the soul: 'o principal worching might, the whiche is clepid a knowable might, & a-nother principal worching might, the whiche is clepid a louyng might'.¹⁰⁵

He is, however, much more effusive on the subject of the devil, who is more relevant to the contemplative's life in that he is a real danger throughout it. Contemplatives are never safe from his tricks, and he constantly throws up new dangers and deceptions. Men are misled into believing they are called to contemplation, and thence they fall further and further into evil, indulging in excesses of asceticism, and other corporeally-based sins and self-deceptions. Heresy follows from all this: 'Treuly of this disceite, & of the braunches ther-of, spryngn many mescheues: moche hypocrisie, moche heresy, & moche errour'.¹⁰⁶ False physical sensations also abound, and the author advises 'Bot alle other counfortes, sounes, & gladnes, & swetnes, that comyn fro with-oute sodenly, & thou wost neuer whens, I prey thee haue hem suspects'.¹⁰⁷ Actual physical illness may also result.¹⁰⁸ The activities of the devil are thus manifold, and the author genuinely wishes to warn his young disciple against them; however, he also seems to have another axe to grind. One has the impression that to him one of the worst things about these activities is that in their deceptiveness they appear as the activities of God: 'For I telle thee trewly that the deuill hath his contemplatyues, as God hath his'.¹⁰⁹ Thus as well as posing a danger to the individual, they call into

disrepute the contemplative way, and the church itself. The devil was clearly a reality to the medieval writer, hence the discussion of necromancy and the physical description of the devil as having only one nostril.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, he took the opportunity, in warning his readers against the deceptions of the devil, to disassociate himself from the stranger sects such as the Brethren of the Free Spirit, and condemn again those theologians who think they can find God through their own cleverness, and in the attempt go against the teaching of the church.

Finally we come, appropriately enough, to the last things, which again do not come in for lengthy treatment. There is no mention of the general resurrection of the dead. The Last Judgement was a reality to the author, but as we have already seen he had a somewhat unusual approach to this, in keeping with his emphasis on the positive, on God as loving Father rather than dispassionate Judge; at the same time, however, there are rather more traditional references: 'For I trowe & alle soche heretikes, & alle theire fautours, & thei might cleerly be seen as thei scholen on the last day, schulde be sene ful sone kumbrid in grete & horryble synnes of the woreld & theire foule flessche priuely, with-uten theire apperte presumpcion in meyntenyng of errour'.¹¹¹ There is, however, no lengthy discussion of Judgement Day, and the same is true of hell. There is passing mention of the fires of hell: 'For he enflaumeth so the ymaginacion of his contemplatyues with the fiire of helle ...',¹¹² There is also a biblical reference to the hard way to heaven and

the easy way to hell.¹¹³ The experience of the individual who seems surrounded by all the sins of his past life is likened to a vision of hell, it is so dreadful, although later he will realise that it is purgatory he is passing through rather than hell.¹¹⁴ Hell is referred to as not knowing what it is to love God,¹¹⁵ thus indicating that it is not something only the dead will experience, but rather it begins in this life on earth, it is an experience, not a place.

Naturally enough in a work such as The Cloud, heaven is spoken of much more frequently than is hell. The same framework is apparent, however, and heaven is not viewed as a place any more than hell. The limitations of our language and understanding lead to it being seen as such, but we should constantly struggle against the inclination to understand literally: 'sithen it so was that Criste schuld assende bodely, & ther-after sende the Holy Goost bodely, then it was more semely that it was upwardes & fro abouen, than outhur donwardes & fro bynethen, byhinde or before, on o side or on other. Bot elles ne were this semelines, hin nedid neuer the more to have wente upwardes then donwardes, I mene for nerenes of the way. For heuen goostly is as neigh down as up, & up as down, bihinde as before, before as behynde, on o side as other, in so moche that who-so had a trewe desire for to be at heuyn, then that same tyme he were in heuen goostly'.¹¹⁶ Just as hell is described as not loving God, so heaven is described as loving God: '& this is the eendles merveilous miracle of loue, the whiche schal neuer take eende; for euer schal he do it, & neuer schal he seese for to do

it. See, who by grace see may, for the felyng of this is eendles blisse.'¹¹⁷ Significantly, and in keeping with the author's emphasis throughout on the work of man, it is the active experience of loving which is spoken of here, not the passive one of being loved. Thus it is clear that heaven is to be experienced in the contemplative love of God, the perfect life, which begins on earth but goes on into eternity where it is fulfilled in the unclouded, beatific vision. There are other references along the way; there will be no meditation on anything in heaven, everything will be perfect: 'For in the tother life, as now, schal be no nede to use the werkes of mercy, no to wepe for oure wrechidnes, ne for the Passion of Criste. For than, as now, schal none mowe hungre ne thirst, ne dighe for colde, ne be seeke, ne housles, ne in prison, ne yit nede beryelles, for than schal none mowe dighe'.¹¹⁸ Spiritual consolations, which on earth are fairly unimportant, are an essential part of the eternal life 'Accydentes I clepe hem, for thei mowe be had & lackyd with-outyn parbraking of it. I mene in this liif; bot it nys not so in the blis of heuen, for there schul thei be onyd with the substaunce with-uten departyng, as schal the body in the whiche thei worche with the soule'.¹¹⁹ The most distinctive contribution the author makes to the discussion on heaven, however, is that discussed above; namely that heaven is not the place where the dead go, it is not a place at all, rather it is man loving God: 'For the highe & the nexte wey theder is ronne by desires, & not by pases of feel ... & sekirly as verrely is a soule there where it louith, as in the body that leueth bi it, &

to the whiche it gheueth liif. & therfore if we wil go to heuen goostly, it nedith not to streyne oure spirit neither up ne doune, ne on o syde ne on other'.¹²⁰

The Cloud is not a summa; many theological doctrines are untouched by the author. He never expounds any doctrine formally, and a certain amount of exposition must always take place, as well as, sometimes, some supposition! But just as philosophy provides a framework for the mysticism of The Cloud, so theology provides the foundation, and this is sufficient justification for examining it. No startlingly original ideas have emerged from our study of it; what has appeared very clearly is that the author was a learned man who did not parade his learning. Also, he was a very orthodox man and he did parade his orthodoxy, more probably from a desire to establish mysticism as a respectable part of the church than to protect his own reputation, considering that he wrote anonymously. Nevertheless, he did not follow orthodoxy blindly, where this was not in harmony with his mysticism, rather he had an eclectic approach so that his theology is always at one with his mystical doctrine. Thus, he emphasises always the unity of the Trinity, as the contemplative's means and end; God the Father is depicted as essentially loving and caring. He does not choose to emphasise the 'Good Friday' part of the work of the Son, and the atoning aspect is treated in less detail than his position as exemplar and as guide and mediator. The work of the Holy Spirit is constant and essential, one with the work of the Father and the Son in the life of the contemplative. Man is depicted as a

victim-albeit of his own disobedience - misguided but not completely lost. His sin is not taken lightly, but in the end God's grace, and man's will towards the good, will overcome evil. Church, sacraments and priesthood are all regarded as essential to active and contemplative alike, and scripture provides important information on both. On some subjects, for example the above-mentioned angelology, the Passion of Christ, and the saints, he has very little to say. Other topics are completely untouched; there are no arguments, for example, on the existence of God, on providence, on the governance of creation, on resurrection. These are quite irrelevant to the subject of The Cloud. However, we can conclude something about almost everything, from hints thrown out, or from his general approach to other matters. The theology of The Cloud is essentially a hopeful theology, emphasising always the good, the positive. The darker side is not ignored - man's sin, the work of the devil, the difficult and lonely times in the mystic's life, all are treated very seriously; but in the end the work of the Godhead will prevail, as the union of God and man is achieved.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. C. Nieva, This Transcending God, Mitre Press, London, 1971.
2. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling, published for The Early English Text Society by Oxford University Press, London, 1944, p. 62. (Henceforth cited as The Cloud).
3. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 139.
4. P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite and other treatises on contemplative prayer related to The Cloud of Unknowing, published for The Early English Text Society by Oxford University Press, London, 1955, p. 53. Hereafter cited as P. Hodgson ed. Deonise Hid Divinite.
5. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 120.
6. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 170.
7. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 13,14.
8. Here we see the author moving from the Thomist, detached concern with existence, to a more personal concern with existence and the individual.
9. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 136.
10. The importance of being, stemming from the vision of God as the ground of all being, is carried through to the author's anthropology, wherein he emphasises how essential it is for the contemplative first to think of himself only as being, without any personal qualities, and ultimately to lose the awareness even of that, in sole concentration on the Being of God.
11. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 159.
12. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 142.

13. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 113.
14. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 30.
15. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 24.
16. P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite, p. 72.
17. For example in A Tretis of Discrecyon of Spirites,
P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite, p. 81.
18. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 147.
19. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 33.
20. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 67.
21. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 88.
22. C. Wolters, The Cloud of Unknowing, Penguin, Middlesex,
1961, p. 27.
23. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 13,14.
24. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 69.
25. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 163.
26. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 69.
27. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 34.
28. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 142.
29. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 130,131.
30. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 53,54.
31. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 120.
32. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 154,155.
33. P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite, p. 49.
34. P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite, p. 51.
35. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 104,105.
36. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 64,65.
37. W. Johnston ed., The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of
Privy Counselling, Image Books, New York, 1973, p. 16.

38. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 90.
39. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 108.
40. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 47
41. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 159.
42. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 159
43. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 14
44. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 142.
45. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 107
46. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 27.
47. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 113.
48. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 44.
49. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 155.
50. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 52.
51. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 54,55.
52. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 157.
53. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 148
54. It is worthwhile to note the distinctively Thomist language here.
55. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 111.
56. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 161.
57. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 86.
58. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 65.
59. For example: P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 96, 97.
60. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 163.
61. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 155.
62. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 136.
63. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 18.
64. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 68.

65. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 38.
66. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 63, 64.
67. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 116.
68. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 68.
69. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 36.
70. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 36, 37.
71. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 73.
72. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 82.
73. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 116, 117.
74. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 69.
75. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 52.
76. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 40, 41.
77. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 38, 39.
78. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 82.
79. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 94.
80. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 62.
81. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 153.
82. P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite, p. 85.
83. P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite, pp. 20, 21.
84. P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite, p. 56.
85. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 15.
86. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 34.
87. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 125.
88. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 104.
89. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 74.
90. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 60.
91. For example: P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 65, p. 92,
p. 170.

92. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 65. It should be noted, however that in the context the author does not restrict this power to priests, but continues by saying that those privately touched by the Holy Spirit may also judge others.
93. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 35.
94. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 63.
95. P. Hodgson ed., Deonise Hid Divinite, p. 49.
96. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 142.
97. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 125.
98. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 114.
99. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 47-55.
100. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 126-129.
101. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 25, p. 158.
102. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 102.
103. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 44.
104. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 114.
105. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 19.
106. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 86.
107. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 91.
108. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 97.
109. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 86.
110. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, pp. 102, 103.
111. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 104.
112. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 103.
113. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 104.
114. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 123.
115. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 19.
116. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 112.

117. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 19.
118. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 54.
119. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 93.
120. P. Hodgson ed., The Cloud, p. 112.

C H A P T E R T H R E E

THE INFLUENCE: PART 1: THE LATE MIDDLE-AGES

We have looked at the background of The Cloud, at some of the writers who contributed to the development of mystical doctrine, and seen how the tradition was gradually built up and refined, to reach a great peak in the Middle Ages; we have seen how the author of The Cloud drew on this inheritance and created a work in which theology and mysticism could be seen complementing each other perfectly. Now we will turn to the future of this work and consider its place in the subsequent tradition of English spirituality. The first writer to be looked at stands, like Meister Eckhart, in a somewhat ambiguous position with regard to the matter of influence, for Walter Hilton, probably the nearest contemporary of the anonymous writer, has regularly been brought forward as the most attractive and plausible candidate as the anonymous writer, in which case the question of influence becomes somewhat redundant. But the spectrum of opinion is very broad, and on the other hand we have the suggestion the Walter Hilton may not even have known the works of the Cloud - corpus.¹

The controversy is almost as old as the works themselves. In 1500 the Carthusian Grenehalgh, an expert on Hilton and The Cloud clearly believed that Hilton was the author of the latter, for in his annotation of the text of The Cloud he makes cross

references to The Scale, and specifically names Hilton as the author.² But in a mid-fifteenth century manuscript of The Cloud there is a note in the margin referring to 'another man's work'.³ The discussion has continued this century. In 1924 Dom Noetinger appeared unconvinced by Hilton's claims,⁴ while Dom McCann, although reluctant to commit himself, was clearly tempted to accept them.⁵ H. Gardner first stated the impossibility of the one-author theory,⁶ then later indulged in some very fine hair-splitting, suggesting that while Hilton might not have written The Cloud, the author of The Cloud might well have written Hilton's works - a somewhat dubious distinction.⁷ P. Hodgson found the differences between the two too great for the idea of common authorship to be convincing, but was undecided as to the relationship between them; who might have borrowed from whom? 'It is incredible that Hilton extracted common teaching from The Cloud to restore to it its usual emphasis; it is possible that the author of The Cloud borrowed ideas from The Scale and fashioned them to his special purposes'.⁸ Yet earlier she had dated The Cloud as preceding at least some of Hilton's works, pointing out the reference in Of Angels Song to the dangers of the 'naked intent' which The Cloud taught.⁹ However, after careful linguistic analysis of the two, as well as an examination of the treatment each gives to common themes - for example, darkness - the conclusion reached is that the most likely explanation of similarities between the two is that both writers were drawing, independently, on a common background.¹⁰ More recently, S.S. Hussey has declared there is no evidence that

Hilton knew the group of Cloud treatises¹¹ - hardly convincing given dates, locations, and the links of both with the Carthusians. And C. Nieva believes that to ascribe all similarities to common sources is to simplify the issue, and is clearly sympathetic towards the school which backs Hilton as author, while admitting there are many differences which seem to make this unlikely.¹²

Clearly, there is material for much debate, and we may ask if there is really much point in conducting it, in the face of all the scholarship that has gone on to date and failed to reach a united opinion. The onus of proof is certainly on those who wish to find an identity for the author, instead of allowing him to remain anonymous as he so evidently wished to do. Indeed, this alone seems to eliminate the possibility of Hilton being the author. Why should he write one group of treatises anonymously, and another group under his name? As nothing more definite can be claimed than that Hilton is the most likely candidate to date, he is not accepted as the author in this thesis. It is highly improbable, as we have remarked, that two writers living and writing around the same time and in the same area, possibly moving within the same circles - for their works certainly did - should have remained unaware of and unaffected by each other's writings. As in the above chapter on the influences on The Cloud, the influence of The Cloud is impossible to prove; but if we accept that Hilton knew at least some of the Cloud corpus, it is difficult to believe that he could remain unaffected by the original and highly striking teaching therein.

Undoubtedly, the two are far from identical; the theology and timbre of The Cloud are very definitely of the Middle Ages, representing, one might claim, a peak in the development of mysticism of the apophatic kind, while Hilton, in places at least, seems to indicate a movement towards the more modern world; a less demanding and perhaps more immediately sympathetic mysticism, one which recognises the need for compromise between the contemplative and the world, a greater emphasis on (although not necessarily a greater awareness of) the exemplary work of Jesus, which was to reach a peak in the Imitatio Christi. But it is easy to exaggerate this slight difference in tone, and in fact the echoes between The Cloud and Hilton are many, their treatment of some of the traditional issues in mysticism very similar, although never identical. Phyllis Hodgson's explanation of these similarities is undoubtedly attractive, although it may appear in the end that it is not entirely adequate. To it may be added another possible explanation, for some of the likenesses between the two, at least, namely those which might have been dictated by the similar context of their writings, and a shared understanding of the mystical life. The author of The Cloud and Hilton both wrote as spiritual directors, each taking for granted the importance of such a guide for all contemplatives. Thus the tone is always one of friendly advice, and a personal interest in the welfare of the reader. However, while The Cloud and the Epistle of Privy Counsel were both written for a young man leading a solitary life, and just embarking on the contemplative, Hilton wrote for several very different people, one of whom, at least,

was in a position of wealth and responsibility, and who was very much involved in the world.¹³ As each wrote to cater for the particular needs of the addressee, the ensuing differences in context are many, and while the anonymous treatises deal only with the upper stages of the contemplative life, Hilton is concerned with the very beginnings of it. Both writers, however, display a similar concern that their works be read only by those genuinely seeking contemplation, they have nothing to offer the active. Perhaps typically, the warning of The Cloud is much more forceful than that of Hilton: 'Fleschly iangelers, glosers & blamers, roukers & rouners, & alle maner of pynchers, kept I neuer that thei sawe this book; for myn entent was neuer to write soche thing to hem. & therfore I wolde not that thei herde it, neither thei ne none of thees corious lettrid ne lewid men, ye! al-thof thei be ful good men in actyue leuyng; for it acordeth not to hem'.¹⁴ 'Also these words that I write to thee, they long not all to a man which hath active life, but to thee or to any other which hath the state of life contemplative'.¹⁵

In their advice to their readers, both the anonymous writer and Hilton display a marked degree of common-sense and practicality which many commentators attribute to their dependable Anglo-Saxonism. However that may be, it is undoubtedly a characteristic of both that they display a sane and balanced attitude towards something which is generally seen, and sometimes treated as being neither sane nor balanced. Thus they are both led to what appears as clear disapproval of and stern warnings against the extravagant language and the emotional

excesses of their predecessor Richard Rolle, and his emphasis on the supernatural gifts of heat, sweetness and song: 'A young man or a womman, newe set to the scole of deuocion hereth this sorow & this desire be red & spokyn ... & trauaylen theire fleschly hertes outrageously in theire brestes ... Or elles, if thei falle not in this, elles thei deserue ... for to have theire brestes outhen enflaumid with an vnkyndely hete of compleccion ... & yit, paraenture, thei wene it be the fiir of loue, getyn & kyndelid by the grace & the goodnes of the Holy Goost'.¹⁶ 'All men that speaketh of the fire of love knoweth not well what it is'.¹⁷ They both follow the mainstream of orthodox mystical writing, in having a very reserved attitude to the supernatural phenomena of mystical experience, regarding them as at best helps for the beginner, at worst temptations and trickery from the devil.¹⁸ They display a horror of excesses, a fear of anything which may lead to self-delusion as regards one's state of holiness, and consequently warn against hypocrites. The author of The Cloud devotes several chapters to describing the antics of such hypocrites;¹⁹ Hilton is likewise very concerned with this. 'Hypocrites not heretics feel not this meekness ... they show outward meekness, in habit, in holy speech, in a lowly bearing ...'.²⁰

Linked with this caution is the emphasis in each writer on the need to remain strictly within the church. As we have seen, this is a strong, if under-stated, part of the teaching of The Cloud. Hilton, too, takes the sacramental life somewhat for granted, but does remind his reader on occasion of its importance

and helpfulness. 'The second thing which thee behoves to have, is secure troth in all articles of the faith, and the sacraments of Holy Kirk, trowing them steadfastly with all the will in thine heart'.²¹ Just as the anonymous writer indicates the value of set prayer, so Hilton advises that the prayers of the church must be said dutifully and meaningfully, and warns against abandoning them.²² There is at the same time, however, a readiness to leave much to the individual. Both recognise that each man's needs are different - which is why some are granted visions and others are not - and so sometimes only the individual knows what is most helpful for him. So the author of The Cloud suggests the young contemplative choose his own word to help him contemplate while Hilton says that any thought which brings peace and rest is the best one for the contemplative.²⁴ This must be held in careful balance with the danger of depending too much on one's own judgement, which both recognise as an especial danger for learned men, and which may lead to the greatest sin of all, pride, and thereafter to heresy.²⁵

The roots of these attitudes of the anonymous writer and Hilton may well go back beyond the fourteen-century; certainly they are not the only writers in the mystical tradition to display them. But they form a fundamental part of the writings of each, are a marked characteristic of each, and appear to be attributable to the personalities of both writers, which, despite the liveliness of the author of The Cloud and the comparative staidness of Hilton, were clearly very similar in some respects. The brilliant Dionysiansim of The Cloud is the lasting

impression, but underlying this is a caution and humanity which at least matches that of Hilton.

We turn now to a more detailed consideration of some similarities and dissimilarities between The Cloud and Hilton, bearing in mind the question of whether or not common sources may account for all the likenesses. Certainly, both writers did not treat these common sources in the same way. Like the anonymous writer, Hilton did not acknowledge his sources openly, with the exception of the scriptural ones, for The Scale is rich in Pauline quotations; but underlying his teaching are those writers whose influence on The Cloud we have already seen, namely St. Augustine, Richard of St. Victor, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventura and Dionysius. However, Hilton is not so strikingly Dionysian as are the works of the Cloud corpus, and whereas in The Cloud the two traditions are balanced exactly, in Hilton's writings the scales seem to tip towards the Augustinian. His is certainly a mysticism of the Dionysian type, it is not simply an Augustinian spirituality, but the uncompromising other-worldliness of Dionysius is considerably watered down, whereas the author of The Cloud, as we have seen, contrived to unite the extremeness of the Dionysian stance with a practical and fully orthodox teaching.

We have remarked in chapter one that the anonymous writer is more theological and less philosophical than his Syrian influence; now, we find his position almost reversed with regard to Hilton, whose works are far less suffused with neo-Platonic philosophy than the anonymous writings. It may be assumed fairly safely that it underlay his mystical teaching, but it certainly does not

saturate it. Thus, there is not the emphasis that God's being is his primary attribute, and that man must respond by offering up his own naked being, which is so marked in The Cloud, and particularly in the Epistle of Privy Counsel. Nor is there overt adherence to the via negativa, although its concomitant of purgation and putting the world beneath oneself, reaching out to God alone, is certainly a major element of Hilton's thought. Evelyn Underhill contrasts the 'dim yet rich theocentric contemplation ... characteristic of The Cloud'²⁶ with Hilton's 'warmer, more intimately Christo-centric tone'. Certainly Hilton is Christocentric, but occasionally it appears that he uses the name 'Jesus Christ' almost as an umbrella term, rather in the way the author of The Cloud uses 'God'. His devotion to the Holy Name is much more openly stated than that of the anonymous writer; 'oil outpoured is Thy name Jhesu to me'.²⁷ He also makes more of the distinct roles of the members of the Trinity, particularly of the Holy Spirit,²⁸ referring to the great gifts of the Spirit, and to the Spirit as the gift of love itself,²⁹ so explaining clearly what is merely implied in The Cloud. But behind Hilton's apparent Christocentrism, as behind The Cloud's apparent theocentrism lies an undoubted Trinitarianism; for Hilton too union in contemplative prayer is with the Trinity: 'But then with the help of the angels, yet the soul seeth more. For knowing riseth above all this in a clean soul; and that is to behold the blessed kind of Jhesu. First of His glorious manhood, how it is worthily highed above all angels kind; and then after of His blessed Godhead, for by knowing of creatures is known the

Creator. And then beginneth the soul for to perceive a little of the privities of the blessed Trinity'.³⁰ The two writers may appear to take different routes to their goal; Hilton's emphasis on the work of Christ is perhaps the heavier, but then, simply because of his more wordy style, his emphasis on many things is heavier. But in fact, as we have seen, in The Cloud too Christ is seen as the essential mediator in the life of the contemplative as of the ordinary Christian, with the stress again that his Godhead is of higher import than his humanity, coming to both writers from St. Bernard's distinction between the carnal and spiritual.³¹ Again, his high evaluation of the neo-Platonic unity ensured that the author of The Cloud always stresses the unity of the Trinity rather than the distinct features and acts of the three persons; but to Hilton also the Trinity was the ultimate goal, and the specific acts of the three persons were all designed to lead the individual to their one-ness. Although they are certainly not identical, the two writers are perhaps closer than they appear at first in their understanding of God and his work through the Trinity. What of their understanding of the gift of grace which God extends to his creature, man?

We have seen how the author of The Cloud has a certain amount of tension in his presentation of grace; Hilton has no such problem. This is partly because he is not as scholarly and precise in his treatment of the topic, he does not discuss the nature of grace so much as its actual workings, and, with this practical approach to the issue, he does not hesitate to come down firmly with the emphasis on man's contribution to the

process. There is a definite connection between a man's activities, and the availability of grace. Good will and good works do not earn grace; but a bad will and bad works will prevent reception of it.³² The more grace is desired, the more will be given, 'For he that most coveteth, most shall have'.³³ The balance between the work of God and the work of man, which the author of The Cloud so struggled to find, is perfectly expressed by Hilton: 'And so it seemeth that neither grace only without full working of a soul that in it is, nor working alone without grace, bringeth a soul to reforming in feeling'.³⁴ Thus again the emphasis in the two writers is slightly different, in The Cloud there is more discussion of the work of God, in Hilton there is more of the work of man, but for both grace is overwhelming and all-powerful: 'For there is no soul so far from God through wickedness of will in deadly sin, I undertake none that liveth in this body of sin, that he may not through grace be righted and reformed to cleanness of living, if he will bow his will to God with meekness ...'.³⁵ The individual may struggle not to give way to his inclinations to sin, but only grace can cleanse him of these inclination: 'But by the grace of Jesus in a meek soul, the ground may be stopped and destroyed, and the spring may be dried'.³⁶

In common with the anonymous writer - and also with many other spiritual writers - Hilton refers to the sense of loss when the individual feels that grace has been withdrawn: 'Nevertheless it falleth oft times that grace withdraweth in party, for corruption of man's frailty, and suffereth the soul fall into

itself in fleshlihead, as it was before; and then is the soul in sorrow and in pain, for it is blind and unsavoury and can do no good'.³⁷ Even this has its positive side too, however, for it heightens one's awareness of the presence of grace.³⁸

Above is discussed the attitude of the author of The Cloud to the question of whether the grace which touches the contemplative is different in intensity or in kind from that which touches the ordinary Christian, and in Hilton we find the same attitude, expressed even more obviously, namely that there is an unbroken progression towards perfection, which indicates that there is but one kind of grace. Certainly, Hilton does refer to 'special grace',³⁹ but as in The Cloud it is special in its intensity, not, essentially different.

In their treatment of sin and sinning the two writers again display similarity of outlook, attributable to their orthodox western background in their view that original sin distorted man's image and ensured a constant battle against impulses to sin.⁴⁰ Dr. Hodgson points out that in The Cloud sin is inseparable from self in this life, whereas Hilton treats it as something which can eventually, with a lot of work and a lot of grace, be removed.⁴¹ Hilton certainly does suggest, repeatedly, that the fount of sin may be dried up,⁴² and states that reform in faith and feeling 'destroys the old feelings of this image of sin',⁴³ a view which would never be found in The Cloud, but, up until this point, the two writers are in agreement. Sin is taken very seriously, and there is strong emphasis on the constancy of the battle against it. Man can never relax, for as soon as one

impulse is fought down, another fresh one arises. Sin separates from God, and the destruction of sin is the recreation of man's likeness and closeness to God. We find one reference in Hilton to sin as a 'lump',⁴⁴ while there are four such in The Cloud. The seven deadly sins briefly discussed in The Cloud are given a far lengthier treatment by Hilton, with the same belief evident that what is mortal sin in the unreformed man may only be venial in the Christian whose heart and will are firmly set on God.⁴⁵

It emerges from the treatment both writers give to the doctrines of grace and sin that each had a very positive attitude towards man. Perhaps Hilton emphasises his abilities and contribution more, to the apparent loss of emphasis on grace, but it is an example of the optimistic and highly practical approach of both that they discuss what man can do as well as what he cannot. This ties in with the psychology of both writers, which comes from Richard of St. Victor. In passages of striking similarity the division of man's soul into the faculties of mind, reason and will is described,⁴⁶ Hilton specifically likening this to the Holy Trinity. It is the importance of the will which is stressed by both writers, as the means by which the soul is united with God: 'The knitting and the fastening of Jhesu to a man's soul is by a good will and a great desire to see Him only'.⁴⁷ Man definitely chooses God, even as God chooses man. The primacy of the will is a part of Hilton's teaching just as it is of The Cloud's;⁴⁸ and the importance of love, the working of the will, in the unitive process, is further discussed below, as we move from points of similarity on theological or doctrinal

matters generally, to those which refer specifically to the contemplative life.

We have suggested that Hilton had a slightly less uncompromising attitude than did the anonymous writer, yet it is hard to pin this down exactly. When we look at specific details, Hilton is as unequivocal as the author of The Cloud, yet the impression remains that he is slightly less rigorous in his expectations. The reason for this may be that he is more concerned than is The Cloud with the earlier stages of the spiritual journey. Thus, for example, there is greater discussion of meditation,⁴⁹ whereas in The Cloud concern is with the stage beyond meditation, where the technique, having been perfected, must be forgotten; and while the author of The Cloud simply states that a thing must be done, Hilton tends to give detailed explanation of how it must be done, in this way softening the impact of a seemingly harsh demand.

We have referred above to the vision of the spiritual life as one of unbroken progression, which is a marked feature of both writers, the very title of Hilton's longest work expressing the centrality of this notion to his thought. Not surprisingly, Hilton discusses what pertains to the various stages in far greater detail than does the author of The Cloud, but the divisions of the Christian life are indeed very similar; Hilton refers to the two ways of life in the church, bodily and ghostly,⁵⁰ but then refers to three ways of living, introducing what has been regarded as a concept peculiar to him, the mixed life.⁵¹ He urges his reader not to depart entirely from the

active life, yet not to engage fully in it: 'Thou shalt meddle the works of the active life with the ghostly works of the life contemplative', and speaks of achieving the work of both 'Mary and Martha'.⁵² Undoubtedly, this is a concept which Hilton developed for this particular reader, who obviously felt himself to be a contemplative at heart but was compelled by his position to be active in the world. Nevertheless, it is not very far from something we find in The Cloud: 'bot if it be to thoo men the whiche, (th)ough al thei stonde in actyete bi outward forme of leuyng, neuertheles yit bi inward stering after the priue sperit of God, whos domes ben hid, thei ben ful graciously disposid, not contynowely as it is propre to verrey contemplatyues, bot than & than to be parceners in the heighest pointe of this contemplatiue acte: if soche men might se it, thei schuld by the grace of God be greetly counforted ther-by'.⁵³ The anonymous writer also was aware of and sympathetic towards those who found themselves in something of the position of Gregory the Great.⁵⁴ Later, we find a subdivision within the active/contemplative distinction very similar to that of Hilton. There are two lives, active and contemplative; but Jesus' statement that Mary chose the best part indicates that there are more than two alternatives. Initially, the author distinguishes four, an upper and a lower part to both active and contemplative. Then the upper part of the active is merged with the lower of the contemplative, so in fact there are three parts, just as Hilton has three lives. 'In this partye is contemplatuye liif & actyue liif couplid to-geders in goostly sibreden & maad sistres, at the ensample of Martha & Marye'.⁵⁵

The two writers are very close indeed on this point down to the imagery of the joining of Mary and Martha. Might Hilton have developed his concept of the mixed life, so appropriate to the needs and circumstances of his reader, from these hints thrown out in The Cloud?

The ongoing character of the search for perfection is further reflected in the fact that the abilities and tools sought are the same for the ordinary Christian as for the advanced contemplative. For Hilton as for the author of The Cloud charity and humility are the cardinal virtues, in them are comprehended all other virtues.⁵⁶ Again, Hilton is more expansive, and his emphasis on the power of these virtues might be seen to undermine the work of grace, although he is in fact safeguarded from this charge by the fact that full virtue is the gift of grace.⁵⁷ In The Cloud there is a distinction between perfect and imperfect humility dependent on whether the feeling is brought about by awareness of one's lowliness, or of God's greatness;⁵⁸ but Hilton's categorisation is slightly different, for his distinction is between virtue in reason, when it may still be an effort to be virtuous, and there may be dissatisfaction, and virtue in affection, the gift of grace, which makes it enjoyable to be virtuous.⁵⁹

The two writers are again in agreement on the importance of the gift of discretion for all Christians, which Hilton too sees as pertaining to many areas, from the needs of the body⁶⁰ to the discerning of hypocrites.⁶¹ However, Hilton is here less discursive than the anonymous writer, and there are no hints as

to his understanding of the nature of discretion, which as we have seen, had been considerably developed from the original as found in Richard of St. Victor. Hilton does refer to discretion as a gift,⁶² but we cannot discern if he saw it as an unearned gift, an unlooked-for by-product of concentration on God alone, or as something specifically sought by the contemplative, and coming only after much trial and long experience. Certainly, he is in close agreement with the anonymous author that there is one sphere alone where the contemplative must not practise discretion, and that is in his desire, pure and whole-hearted, for God.⁶³

In this way discretion is linked with the belief which is the very foundation of Hilton's teaching as of The Cloud's. In the likenesses we have discussed above there is a certain amount of superficiality, beneath which lie differences of varying degree, but when it comes to the question of love, the only way to God, the two writers are agreed in the essentials.

Although Hilton discusses its part in the lower stages of the journey to God, reason is utterly repudiated in the higher stages, and love alone is the moving power as the contemplative approaches God.⁶⁴ The heart must be so filled with love of God that there is no room in it for anything else, and so in order to have this single-minded love, the contemplative must go through the process of self-emptying and purification. This does not mean merely forsaking the things of this world, but also forsaking love of them. The latter is much harder, but cannot be avoided, for as long as some other desire remains in the

heart, God may not be fully desired, and until he is he cannot be found.⁶⁵ Hilton urges his addressee to struggle 'that thy desire might be as it were made naked and bare from all earthly things',⁶⁶ for the very ground of the search for God is 'an whole intent to God'.⁶⁷ 'He most loveth God that through grace is most departed from the love of this world'.⁶⁸ This desire for God and hatred of the world are opposite sides of the same coin, in a way that is strongly reminiscent of the teaching of The Cloud, which is so succinctly expressed in the statement that God 'is a gelous louver & suffreth no felawship, & him list not worche in thi wille bot if he be only with thee bi hym-self'.⁶⁹ Interestingly, however, while the anonymous writer includes meditation among the things which must be rejected, as drawing the mind down from its naked intent on God, Hilton specifically refers to the benefits of meditation in this context, whether it be on the goodness of Jesus Christ, or the wretchedness of the world. 'The more that thou thinkest and feelest the wretchedness of this life, the more fervently shalt thou desire the joy and the rest of the bliss of heaven'.⁷⁰ This is another example of how Hilton is concerned with the lower stages of the spiritual ascent also, rather than of a profound difference in attitude to meditation.

God asks nothing of his contemplatives but that they love him utterly, and when they do, the power of their love is unequalled by anything. The soul is freed from the dangers of carnal love, and the echoes of St. Bernard are strong as we are told how creatures may be loved in that they have their being from God.⁷¹ Love takes possession of the soul completely, and

its forceful, almost violent character is reflected in the reference to the 'blissful sword of love',⁷² so akin to The Cloud's 'scharpe darte of longing love'.⁷³

There is, however, an element in Hilton's teaching on love which may seem quite unfamiliar to readers of The Cloud, and that is his distinction between desire, and love. Real love begins only in heaven, what we know on earth is only desire for God, which is but the beginning of love⁷⁴ - although for most of the time Hilton uses the term 'love' to describe the contemplative's feeling for God. Certainly, the author of The Cloud does not make this distinction overtly, but on the other hand there is no doubt that the love he describes is eros, and there is a difference between love unfulfilled on earth, and love fulfilled in heaven. However, Hilton goes on to distinguish further between love formed, and love unformed. Love formed is what all men may feel, the gift of the Holy Spirit, love unformed is the Holy Spirit itself, the greatest gift possible, and only given to contemplatives.⁷⁵ This is something we do not find in The Cloud, nor is it a contradiction of anything we do find there; but it is certainly an example of how, while Hilton might well have been influenced by the other writer - and they are very close indeed in their understanding of the role of love in the mystics journey - he was also an independent thinker who made his own original contributions to mystical doctrine.

Thus far in their description of the route to God the two writers are in agreement, but as they near the goal subtle differences emerge. We have seen how both follow the way of

purgation; as Dr. Hodgson and J.E. Milosh point out, the 'dark nights of the senses' which they describe are very close indeed.⁷⁶ Earthly things and thoughts are put away, until eventually all that remains is a dark awareness of one's self as sin. This is a dark and painful time, but essential if one is to find God, and Hilton is as uncompromising on this point as the anonymous writer, summing it up perfectly as he says 'Nevertheless in this dark conscience behoueth thee to swink and sweat ... And then, when thou findest right nought but sorrow and pain and blindness (in this murkness) if thou wilt find Jhesu the pain of this dark conscience thee behoueth suffer, and abide awhile therein'.⁷⁷ However, Hilton has also made it clear that the dark night is but a temporary state of affairs, a short stage in the contemplative life. Hilton says there are in life two days, divided by a night. The first is false day, love of the world, the second day is love of God. Between them comes the night, and the contemplative 'must abide a while in the night'.⁷⁸ After living through the darkness of night the soul is truly purified and will never live in false light again.⁷⁹ This is very different from The Cloud where it is evident that the darkness is life-long, not only is there constant struggle and temptation, but God is always encountered in darkness in this life. In other words, while the author of The Cloud remains true to the Dionysian paradox of light in darkness, knowledge in unknowing, Hilton diverges at this point, towards something slightly more Augustinian. Hence his emphasis is on illumination and knowledge. He has of course rejected the use of

reason in contemplative prayer, and the knowledge of God achieved is knowledge which comes of love. The third part of contemplation, which 'may be had in this life, but the fullhead of it is kept unto the bliss of heaven,'⁸⁰ consists of both loving and knowing God. In The Cloud too God is ultimately known, but there is not the emphasis on knowledge that we find in Hilton. It is almost as if Hilton feared the darkness and emptiness which Dionysian mystics sought and, just as he did not commit himself to the via negativa, he wished to substitute for the dark night of the soul something altogether more tangible and familiar.

The question of the relationship between Walter Hilton and the author of The Clodd may not have been brought any closer to being answered by the above discussion, which perhaps proves no more than that the two had many ideas in common, but that they brought to these ideas their very different slant. If Hilton was influenced by the other writer, it was not unreservedly. But it is not convincing that the two remained unknown to and unaffected by each other; perhaps, rather than attempting to see them as teacher and pupil, it is more satisfactory to regard them as working partners, both following the same tradition, indebted to the same forerunners, and simultaneously contributing to the further development of that tradition, the growth of the mystical school in medieval England and beyond.

The popularity of the works of the Cloud-corpus, and of the other medieval mystical works, was both immediate and considerable, despite the anonymous writer's concern that his

works circulate only among those genuinely concerned with and involved in the contemplative life. Thus the fourteenth century flowering of mysticism was followed by a period of harvesting, when the great works of Rolle, the anonymous writer, Hilton, and Julian of Norwich were studied, copied, and annotated. That there must have been a great many texts of these works is indicated by the numbers still surviving. Of The Cloud there remains seventeen texts, ten of the Epistle of Privy Counsel, two of Deonise His Divinite, eleven of the Study of Wisdom, seven of The Treatise on Discerning of Spirits, and four of The Epistle of Discretion in Stirrings, in a total of twenty-seven manuscripts, dating between the early fifteenth century and the late sixteenth; thus the popularity of the treatises was not short-lived, nor was it restricted to a small geographical sphere for there are links with houses from north Yorkshire to London - notably Carthusian.⁸¹ The advent of printing also contributed greatly to the dissemination of The Cloud and other mystical works; The Scale of Perfection was first printed in 1494, and by 1533 was into its fourth edition.⁸² Thus, by the sixteenth century the medieval mystical works were firmly established in the religious handbook tradition; but by now a revolution was underway which was to destroy the way of life of the religious in England. What would be its effect on the works these spirituals had read? To this question we now turn our attention.

PART TWO:

AN UNACKNOWLEDGED INFLUENCE ON ENGLISH SPIRITUALITY?

Despite the destructive effect of the Reformation on the world of the English contemplatives, it had at least one very positive consequence, namely to ensure for the works of the contemplative tradition not one, but two possible groups of readers. In what follows we intend to concentrate on a relatively few authors who are generally accepted as being representative of their ecclesiastical and theological traditions.

First of these were the established readers, the English Catholics who took with them into their exile the works of their heritage. Hardly surprisingly, in an age of turmoil, they held tightly to their legacy, and, as The Cloud had been translated into Latin by 1491, it now had international potential. As Dom Knowles states 'The Cloud and its companions held the field until driven out by the full flood of the Reform, and were then carried into exile by more than one of the religious houses at the end of Mary's reign'.⁸³ We know it reached northern France at least, for Fr. Augustine Baker used it when teaching Benedictines in Cambrai.⁸⁴ In this way the survival of the medieval works was ensured on one side of the chasm caused by the Reformation.

The other group of potential heirs to the mystical school were among those who became part of the reformed tradition,

and here it was the original vernacular form of the works which enabled their survival. They were now part of the spiritual heritage of England, and could no more be swept under the carpet than could the churches themselves which had to remain in use; and if some of their ideas were at variance with tenets of the Protestant faith, there were also, on a practical level, aspects not inimical to it, even if these were not the essentials, but of a rather more superficial nature. Certainly, the period of the Reformation was a fallow one as far as the growth of the spiritual tradition in England was concerned.

The Catholic Tradition : St. Thomas More

One man emerges as a link between the old world and the new, in his own life embodying the conflict between the contemplative world and the active. His problem was not a new one - Gregory the Great had faced it a thousand years before - but now it was not simply a personal difficulty. St. Thomas More did not turn away from the contemplative life in England, but witnessed its death. Simultaneously, however, he showed how a man who for most of this life was an active and prominent figure in the political world retained a deep inward piety which ultimately meant far more to him than any position of power. The pull of the contemplative life, personally experienced in his sojourn in or near the Charterhouse of London, remained strong throughout his life. Ironically, only towards its end did he enjoy anything like the contemplative life

again, writing to his daughter from the Tower of the benefits of imprisonment, the periods for prayer and meditation.⁸⁵

R.W. Chambers discusses the importance of the medieval English mystics for St. Thomas' writing, claiming that parts of The Cloud and the works of Walter Hilton 'read like forecasts of the prose of More'.⁸⁶ The debt is more than merely a literary one, however, and Bernard Fisher has carried out a study of St. Thomas as a 'great saint and great contemplative',⁸⁷ in which he shows St. Thomas as a direct heir of the great English mystics, and in particular traces his debt to Walter Hilton. In the face of this, the following discussion may seem somewhat redundant, but a cursory glance at some of the salient points of St. Thomas' spirituality is useful in pointing out his stance, between the mysticism of the Middle Ages, and post-Reformation spirituality. Richard Marius has pointed out that St. Thomas More was not a mystic; 'More wanted to be a mystic, but lacked the gift; he did have mystical sensibilities'.⁸⁸ Perhaps this made him the ideal transmitter of a profound spirituality which, while always falling short of the ultimate goal, nevertheless contained all the other elements of the mystic's spiritual journey, as expressed in the works of the English mystics.

Throughout his life St. Thomas retained a faith that was essentially personal and inward, his concern was with his own soul, a feature that become increasingly marked with his fall from grace.⁸⁹ Interestingly, he was acquainted

with William Grocyn, who studied and lectured on Dionysius' Celestial Heirarchy⁹⁰; what his opinions were on Dionysius' teaching we cannot tell, but it is not too difficult to see traces of Dionysius' paradoxical darkness in the description of the dark churches of Utopia, and the belief that through this dim light the believer is led to true worship and vision.⁹¹ He was also strongly aware of the darker, painful side of faith-again a consciousness which grew with his own problems, when he seemed to take comfort from remembrance of Christ's time of anguish.⁹² His devotion to the mystical body of Christ is also strongly evocative of the mysticism of Walter Hilton and Jean Gerson, - as B. Fisher points out, in his Confutation Against Tyndale St. Thomas recommends works by both these writers.⁹³

Among his copious writings, however, one prayer by St. Thomas, written during his imprisonment, seems to sum up the essence of his personal faith, and it is worth quoting this prayer in full:

'Give me thy grace, good Lord,
 To set the world at nought;
 To set my mind fast upon thee,
 And not to hang upon the blast of men's mouths;
 To be content to be solitary;
 Not to long for worldly company;
 Little and little utterly to cast off the world,
 And rid my mind of all the business thereof;

Not to long to hear of any worldly things,
But that the hearing of worldly phantasies
may be to me displeasing.

Gladly to be thinking of God.

Piteously to call for his help;

To lean unto the comfort of God,

Busily to labour to love him;

To know my own vility and wretchedness

To humble and meeken myself under the mighty
hand of God;

To bewail my sins passed;

For the purging of them patiently to suffer
adversity;

Gladly to bear my purgatory here;

To be joyful of tribulations;

To walk the narrow way that leadeth to life,

To bear the cross with Christ;

To have the last thing in remembrance

To have ever afore mine eye my death that is
ever at hand;

To make death no stranger to me,

To foresee and consider the everlasting fire
of hell;

To pray for pardon before the judge to come,

To have continually in mind the passion that
Christ suffered for me;

For his benefit incessantly to give thanks,

To buy the time again that I before have lost;

To abstain from vain confabulations,

To eschew light foolish mirth and gladness;

Recreations not necessary - to cut off;

Of worldly substance, friends, liberty, life

and all, to set the loss at right nought

for the winning of Christ;

To think my most enemies my best friends;

For the brethren of Joseph could never have

done him so much good with their love

and favor as they did him with their malice

and hatred,

These minds are more to be desired of every

man than all the treasure of all the princes

and kings, christian and heathen, were

it gathered and laid together all upon

one heap.⁹⁴

Here, in essence, are the beliefs of the medieval mystics; the recognition that the world must be as nothing to the spiritual man, he must neither possess nor desire the things of the world, but instead must bend all his thoughts on God, who alone can comfort and strengthen him. A solitary life must be sought, true humility can be achieved, and all suffering must be welcomed, for in this one is truly following the way of Christ. Elsewhere, St. Thomas uses the violent language

so reminscent of The Cloud and Meister Eckhart: 'Trahe me post te'⁹⁵, and yearns for something higher than human meditation: 'Take from me, good Lord, this lukewarm fashion, or rather key-cold manner of meditation, and this dullness in praying unto thee. And give me warmth, delight and quickness in thinking upon thee.'⁹⁶ However, in the end, St. Thomas is aiming for something less than the direct union of the soul with the Godhead; instead, he seeks to be a part of the mystical body of Christ, a goal much more attainable than the beatific vision, and bringing us once again to the suggestion that, if any one English mystic was a major influence on him, it was Walter Hilton, and not the author of The Cloud. As well as this Christological emphasis, there was an aspect of Hilton's teaching which must have seemed almost personally directed at St. Thomas, namely his idea of the mixed life. We have already referred to his hankering after the contemplative life. As Richard Marius says 'All his life he retained a nostalgia for the monastic ideal',⁹⁷ so that, while the call of the world was too strong to resist, in the end he looked on his imprisonment as a blessing at least in its resemblance to the solitary life. The teaching on the mixed life, lived by those whose inclination is towards the solitary life, but who are bound by duty to live in the world, was singularly appropriate to St. Thomas More, and may have given Walter Hilton an extra appeal - although as has been suggested above, Hilton himself may have developed his doctrine from hints

thrown out in The Cloud. Again, St. Thomas' knowledge of Hilton is traced back to his sojourn in the London Charterhouse, whence came two surviving manuscripts of Hilton's works, and if it was indeed there that St. Thomas encountered Hilton's thought, it is very reasonable to posit that during the same period he came into contact with the text of The Cloud, whose links with the Carthusian order are every bit as strong as those of Hilton.

St. Thomas was, however, very much on his own, a lone figure concerned with the purely spiritual aspect of religion, in an era when church polity was apparently of greater concern than personal piety. It was not really until the seventeenth century that religious writers began to address themselves en masse to those matters which had concerned the medieval writers. Hence, after a very long gap, in which momentous changes had taken place, we come to the Puritans; could these staunchly Protestant figures be the heirs to The Cloud, Walter Hilton et al?

The Puritans

The name 'Puritan' first appears in England around 1565, but clearly scholars since that time have found difficulty in pinning down a precise criterion of who is a Puritan. In common useage the term is a very wide umbrella taking in such disparate elements as Elizabethan Anglicans like Sibbes, Independent Republicans like Owen, Scottish Presbyterians like Rutherford, some Caraline divines and later figures of

a variety of ecclesiastical origins. Yet they may be identified by their historical period, biblicism, Calvinism, moralism and readiness to criticise society on theological bases. Our aim in this section is limited. We do not attempt a general survey of all 'Puritan' writers nor an account of all types of Puritan spirituality. We look at the possible influence of the mystical approach of The Cloud in a general way among Puritan writers and then proceed to a more detailed examination of Richard Baxter and Francis Rous. What traces of the great English tradition could be found in these writers? Obviously, they could not take up their legacy wholesale; a great many alterations and, more importantly, omissions must be made before it could be acceptable, but even then, much of value remained. We have but one incontrovertible piece of evidence that there was knowledge of and interest in the medieval mystics on the part of one Puritan at least, for in 1571 a mid-fifteenth century manuscript of The Cloud came into the possession of the Puritan John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury.⁹⁸ Thus is refuted R.W. Chambers' suggestion that 'With Exmew, then, ends, for the time, so far as England is concerned, the history of The Cloud'.⁹⁹ As Bouyer says 'Even the most anti-Roman Puritans saw no harm in reading the spiritual works of the 'Papists' and deriving all possible profit from them'.¹⁰⁰

The Puritans, of course, did not need to find inspiration only in the writings of earlier compatriots; just as the

medieval mystics now had two possible outlets, so the English Puritans had two possible sources of influence. Geographically, the English mystics were their logical source, theologically, the continental reformers claimed this position.

Luther's debt to the mystics of the Middle Ages is well known, and in this, perhaps, he set a precedent for his followers. Of the Rhineland mystic Tauler he said 'Neither in the Latin nor the German language have I ever found purer or more wholesome teaching, nor any that so agrees with the Gospel'.¹⁰¹ The Theologica Germanica was a very influential work for him, and his edition of it is still used today. Traces of the mystical influence are to be found throughout his works, and certainly his appeal for the freedom of the individual to establish a direct relationship with God is in harmony with the mystical movement. But the likenesses are more superficial than profound, his use of medieval mysticism essentially utilitarian and perhaps in this too he set a precedent. Luther's picture of the God-man relationship is not really compatible with that of the mystics. Although mysticism has a strong awareness of man's lost and lowly state, his utter separation from God, there is side by side with this a belief that there is something in man which enables him to respond to God, and the neo-Platonism on which medieval mysticism was based meant that the movement towards God was seen as a natural one, the proper and designed end for man, although this was always complemented by the view that grace was necessary if the end

was to be realised. In Luther there is nothing of this, for him men are nothing and remain nothing, he has no concept of growth towards perfection, no idea of sanctification. His theology of the cross makes it clear that it is in darkness and suffering that God is encountered, but it is a very different darkness from that of the Dionysian tradition, the word is used literally rather than paradoxically. In essence, Luther had moved on from the mysticism of the Middle Ages, and to some extent the post-Reformation English writers adopted his position. The esoteric Dionysianism held no charms for them, they preferred to keep their feet firmly on the ground, and in this Luther provided them with a sure foundation. Undoubtedly their emphasis that Christ must always be the mediator between God and man comes from the Lutheran tradition, but Luther did not provide them with all the elements which made up the very broad spectrum of Puritan spirituality.

It is not, of course, with the name of Luther that the Puritans are linked, but with that of Calvin; Bouyer says of them that they are Calvin's most direct spiritual descendants.¹⁰² Calvin's most important contribution was obviously his return to the notion of sanctification, whereby he envisaged man's life, once touched by God, as one long struggle towards perfection. In this, Christ acts not only as mediator but as example 'For we have been adopted as sons by the Lord with this one condition; that our life express Christ, the bond of our adoption'.¹⁰³ The change is not merely in outward

Practice, but also in the heart, for, he claims, the seat of faith is in the heart. Love is important, but notably, love only follows faith. 'It is faith alone that first engenders love in us'.¹⁰⁴ Again we find that we must entirely forget self, for self-interest leads to destruction; in its place we must seek humility, eventually coming to love all things in God. Prayer is important as man's means of coming to know God, but this is only possible through Christ, so in fact there is no direct communication with the Godhead. Again, although he declares that in prayer the mind is lifted in pure contemplation of God, the statement that we should always pray with fear, indicates that his understanding of prayer is very far from the mystics' contemplative prayer. While the seventeenth-century English writers certainly have an element of fear in their vision of the God-man relationship, they do not stress in this way that it should obtrude even into their prayer. Similarly, while Calvin does talk of love as an important part of faith, his spirituality on the whole does not bear any real atmosphere of love in a way that some at least of the later English writings do, as we will see. Calvin's God is essentially a most unattractive one, utterly transcendent; to come into direct contact with man would be to diminish the glory which was to Calvin the most important aspect of God's being; the post-Reformation writers do, however, achieve at least a partial return to the medieval ability to hold onto a God who is both transcendent and immanent.

Their God is more approachable than Calvin's, and in this they are more in line with the tradition of their earlier country-men than with the founder of their reformed church.

The theology of the two great Reformers undoubtedly influenced the spirituality of the English post-Reformation writers, as it did their doctrine and ecclesiastical polity; but at the same time other influences were at work, and the darkness of Luther's thought, and the coldness of Calvin's were in many Anglicans and Puritans tempered by the warmth of feeling and an optimism which may well have come down to them from the English mystics of the fourteenth-century, so that, while their theology remained very far from that of the Catholic writers, the general atmosphere of their spirituality was closer than might have been expected.

It was, however, the more unorthodox branch of the Reformation which was most single-mindedly concerned with personal piety; can elements of the seventeenth-century English outlook be traced back to this, or was there too strong a tendency to steer clear of dubious individuals and movements? Certainly, the Anglicans lacked the anarchistic inclinations of Munzer and his followers, but among Puritans at least there was a strong millennialism. Indeed Ian Murray suggests that their millennial tendencies led to their emphasis on prayer and personal piety,¹⁰⁵ for they had a great horror of eccentricities and excesses, rife in millennialism more than any other area. The ideas of Schwenkfeld, with his emphasis on perfection,

which all Christians must seek, to participate eventually in the divine, and his follower Christian Hoburg gained some adherents, but only in Germany. The influence of Hans Denck and Jacob Boehme, however, did extend to England, where John Everard followed the teaching of Denck, and the Quakers and William Law were both affected by Boehme's teaching on the inner Word, or inner Light. But on the whole, the influence of these 'mystical' Lutherans in England tended to be limited to individuals rather than to schools of thought and, excepting Law and Fox, these individuals were not in the main to have a lasting influence themselves on the religious climate in England; they tended towards the category of those hailed as unsafe and subversive, and it may be that the seventeenth-century writers were as happy to look for their spiritual guides to their earlier countrymen as to their continental contemporaries. After all, it is a characteristic of the Reformers that they were prepared to take what was good from the Catholic tradition, while denying the goodness of the whole, and while elements of Catholic mysticism were at least as unsafe as some of the radical reformers, some writers at least had the security of being historically established, and their taint had perhaps faded through time. But certainly, we must not overlook the influence of the continental writers, who undoubtedly contributed to the atmosphere of a spirituality which represented a return to a more inward religion, and a more hopeful and positive one in many ways than that which

Luther and Calvin had propounded.

Yet, there is certainly more to Puritan spirituality than may be accounted for by their debt to the continental Reformation, and so we come again to the question; can this be found among the medieval mystics of England? We have suggested that they were now a part of the English religious tradition and on this count alone could not be brushed aside by the Reformation, and Martin Thornton argues strongly for the continuity of the tradition from the Middle Ages through to the Caroline divines, emphasising how anxious the Protestant tradition has always been to emphasise its origins in the established church.¹⁰⁶ He enumerates many similarities between the two, which are not merely trivia, but among the central characteristics of each. He refers to a revival of interest in Greek philosophy, as in Anthony Sparrow, and a return to a more positive attitude to creation, which he claims might have come from the school of St. Victor. The seventeenth century also shared with the medievals the concept of individual responsibility, and in both groups therefore there is a consciousness of the need for spiritual guidance and guides - hence there were relationships between Puritan divines and their often wealthy acolytes, as in the Middle Ages. He clearly believes that it was the continued circulation of such works as The Cloud which lay behind this unbroken continuity which he refers to as being 'more of a pastoral, underground current, than a conscious theological development'.¹⁰⁷ This undoubtedly

accounts for part of it, but we must not forget another important vehicle of the medieval beliefs, the continuation of Platonist and neo-Platonist philosophy. Platonism had never really died during the Reformation - Calvin displays some markedly Platonic attitudes¹⁰⁸ - and was firmly entrenched in seventeenth-century England. The Cambridge Platonists, taught by Benjamin Whitcote and believing in a spark in the soul which through the work of the Holy Spirit enables union with God, were by no means the only Platonists of their age. There were many who had some sort of belief in the search of the soul for perfection and union with God, based on a Platonic or neo-Platonic philosophy, and two names in particular stand out, John Everard (d. 1650) and Giles Randall (fl. 1645).

Everard, already referred to as a follower of Hans Denck, was clearly attached to Dionysian mysticism. His work includes translations of parts of Eckhart and Johannes Tauler, and of Dionysius' Mystical Theology, and in his own Gospel Treasures, he shows himself to be clear adherent of the via negativa.¹⁰⁹ He believed in an heirarchical order of being wherein man must rise from his finite state of existence up to his infinite source, a movement achieved by the putting away of material objects, which is at first a conscious effort, then, as the individual grows closer to God, becomes easier and more natural. In this work, Christ acts as guide and example. The similarities between Everard, fourteenth-century mysticism, and later Puritans and Anglicans are instantly obvious, and it seems

that Everard acted as a bridge between the two in two ways, by making available the earlier works of the mystical tradition, and by teaching his own ideas, showing how the earlier writers were relevant to men of the sixteenth century. Giles Randall was a slightly less obvious heir to the Dionysian tradition, for he rejected outright the via negativa, asserting that the sole way to God is through Christ. Oddly enough, since this was a very orthodoxly Puritan emphasis, he was persecuted as Everard had not been; while Thomas Brooks had strongly approved of Everard, Samuel Rutherford (d. 1661) was deeply suspicious of Randall, claiming that he taught the possibility of perfection in this life.¹¹⁰ He certainly believed in progress towards perfection as the movement of the religious life, wherein we progress from works and external practices to inner meditation and the performing of God's will as a natural act - as with Everard, vestiges of something akin to discretion remain. However, as stated above, he emphasised that this was possible solely through the possession of Christ, displaying a marked Christocentricity characteristic of the later Puritans, and of mystics outwith the Dionysian school. So from the late sixteenth-century Everard to the early seventeenth-century Randall there is perhaps a movement away from the school of The Cloud rather than towards it, yet still a retention of The Cloud's basic mystical outlook, and Everard and Randall are undoubtedly the most obvious heirs to the legacy left by the anonymous writer and his contemporaries;

yet they, and the Cambridge Platonists, were a fairly small and uninfluential group, unrepresentative, on the whole, of the English spiritual climate at that time. To find out if the medieval mystics still had a place in the mainstream of spiritual thought, we turn to the Puritans, where traces may still be found of the fourteenth century work.

It must be made clear, here, that the role of The Cloud in Puritan thought would have been very different from that of Dionysius, or Richard of St. Victor, in the thought of the anonymous writer. We will not be discussing fundamentals, for the essentials of The Cloud, as stated above, are most emphatically not the essentials of Puritan spirituality, and consequently the following study may in some ways seem to be of a superficial nature.

Puritanism was not a rigidly defined school of thought; in all areas there were almost as many opinions as there were individuals. Therefore, it is felt that the only viable approach to the question of a possible influence of The Cloud on Puritan thought is by a study of individuals, deliberately taken across the spectrum. This method may be aesthetically unpleasing, but in the end is perhaps more accurate than any other. Therefore we will begin this study by looking at some of the general notions found in The Cloud and Puritan writers, before progressing to consideration of the archetypal Puritan Richard Baxter (d. 1691) and the rather atypical Francis Rous (d. 1659).

We have remarked already that the original vernacular form of The Cloud made it instantly accessible to post-Reformation writers and uneducated laity as a work in Latin would not have been; another very attractive feature would have been the down-to-earth, practical stance adopted by the author, despite the highly esoteric nature of his teaching. There is no truck with the more suspect elements of mysticism, the physical and psychological phenonema so prominent in, for example, Richard Rolle. Level-headedness and the desire for orthodoxy rule the day, in a way that would appeal to the Puritan school, and possible reflections of the earlier author appear in several Puritan writers, covering the whole spectrum of the spiritual life, from the understanding of sin to the relation between the active and contemplative life.

We have seen the importance of original sin in The Cloud, and the consequent need for grace; it may have come as something of a surprise to some post-Reformation writers to find here a writer clearly more concerned with original than actual sin, and who categorically stated that baptism could not remove the taint of original sin. The reference to the vision of oneself as a lump of sin, which so characterises the medieval writer's understanding of sin, is mirrored in Thomas Brooks: 'As soon as sin entered Adam's heart, all sin entered his soul and overspread it'.¹¹¹ The earlier belief that sin refers to the state of mind rather than to a specific act also emerges in Brooks, who believes that in yielding to sin

man is drawn to greater sin; as lesser sins enter the heart and work there insidiously consequently a sin lying in the heart is often the most dangerous sort.¹¹²

As with sin, the great separator from God, so with grace, the unifying force, the Puritans and the medieval author share a common emphasis on man's inability to get anywhere without this gift. More surprisingly, we also find in William Guthrie (d. 1665) the reminder that we cannot simply sit back and allow everything to happen. A certain amount of preparatory work must be carried out in the soul by God, but after that it is man's part to work towards his own salvation, realising his own sin and unworthiness, and gradually desiring salvation more and more, wishing to be alone to meditate, and loving and according due honour to Christ.¹¹³ Guthrie sees a balance in the Christian life, wherein God's work and the individual's work together are necessary for salvation - a balance similar to that we have already seen in The Cloud. In the initial stages, all the work is God's, and he chooses to whom it will be granted. Similarly, different men are treated differently, and the medieval writer refers to the fact that some are granted spiritual consolations, while others are not, and Guthrie writes of the calling of some in their infancy, and others in their maturity.¹¹⁴

In their representation of the life led by the individual after he has been chosen by God, The Cloud and the Puritans again display common features although interpreted in different

ways, and given different emphases. This is particularly marked in the subtle change that has taken place re rejection of the world. Abandonment of the world still plays a major part in the Christian life: 'I have learned some greater mortification, and not to mourn after or seek to suck the world's dry breasts'.¹¹⁵ However, this has ceased to mean a total rejection of the world; it is not that it must be completely ignored, rather, that men should be wary of placing any value on it, and in this historical circumstances obviously dictated the change in attitude, for the solitary life as advocated in The Cloud was not now the norm for the religious man.

The very practical attitude of the anonymous writer is one of his strongest characteristics, appearing for example in the advice given on how to deal with temptations sent from the devil. Several devices are suggested to ensure that the contemplative is not defeated by such evil machinations, and three hundred years later Thomas Brooks (d.1680) was to devote a whole book¹¹⁶ to this issue, suggesting some remedies highly reminiscent of The Cloud. The principal likeness is the emphasis on the value of humility when tempted to turn from the truth, for 'Humility will keep the soul free from many darts of Satan's casting'.¹¹⁷ The author of The Cloud had suggested that the contemplative, when beset by trouble or temptation, should not attempt to stand up against them, but rather to crouch down, admitting his own helplessness, and

to pray for succour.¹¹⁸ Brooks enumerates many problems that will face the Christian, some of which confront only the beginner, and others which plague even the most advanced, for example 'casting in a multitude of vain thoughts whilst the soul is in seeking of God or in waiting on God'.¹¹⁹ This warning strongly recalls chapters seven and eight of The Cloud. However, while Brooks has many remedies against Satan's devices, the author of The Cloud really has only one - the fixing of the whole self on love of God. If this is done, not much harm will ensue. But by the seventeenth century this belief has changed somewhat. Brooks certainly mentions the power of love: keep up holy and spiritual affections; for such as your affections are, such will be your thoughts'.¹²⁰ However, love does not, in this instance, have the primary place or emphasis given it in The Cloud.

Along with temptations go humility and suffering, in the Puritan conception of the Christian life as in The Cloud, although again with slight amendments. Among other Puritans¹²¹ the emphasis shifts from humility to humiliation, a step the medieval writer would not have countenanced, as evincing too strong an emphasis on self. Struggle and suffering are an integral part of the contemplative's journey towards God, and there is in many Puritan works a sharp consciousness of the darker side of the spiritual life. In Samuel Rutherford the idea is especially strong (predictably, perhaps, in letters written from prison). The way to heaven is marked by pain

and struggle, for God has decreed this is the fit way for men to approach him. There is therefore a positive side to suffering: 'Without tribulations and temptations we can grow no more than can corn without rain'.¹²² There is even a positive side to temptation - which will be with us as long as we live¹²³ - for it makes us constantly alert; faith flourishes in adverse conditions, he says, no doubt speaking from experience.

Finally, we come to the place of love in the Puritans. Love is the very hall-mark of The Cloud, superseding one's impressions of its orthodox theology and its more esoteric Dionysian teaching. If any one aspect of its teaching should have survived, we would expect it to have been this. The Puritans, on the other hand, are not best remembered for their emphasis on the power of love. In their writings sin, judgement, damnation, humiliation, all the harsher aspects of the Christian faith are emphasised to a degree and in a way quite foreign to the teaching of The Cloud. Yet we still find that for some of them too, love opens many doors, and there is a strong belief that in the heart lies the way to God. 'The seat of faith is not in the brain, but in the heart, and the head is not the place to keep the promises of God, but the heart - is the chest to lay them up in'.¹²⁴ William Guthrie declares that the Christian must and can love only God, on whom all his hopes are fixed and in whom is all his delight,¹²⁵ pointing out that in the Eucharist there is a moment of special closeness

and love.¹²⁶ Samuel Rutherford believes in the compelling power of love, and in men's inability, once love has taken hold of them, to be freed of it.¹²⁷ Love is clearly a part of the Puritan teaching on the relationship between God and man, as well as the medieval, although it may be a matter of debate whether or not love was seen, by the later writers, to achieve such great heights as the medieval mystics believed possible.

It would be virtually unthinkable to consider the Puritans as a group without also considering Richard Baxter, who seemed to possess all that was best in the Puritan outlook, with none of its narrowness and rigidity. His desire for harmony, his tolerant outlook and earnest spirituality, imply that he, above all, would have been ready to learn from and use his religious heritage, although with 'the eclectic approach that had earlier marked the author of The Cloud.

Philosophically, Baxter began from the position of the medieval mystics, and the neo-Platonic language he uses when talking of God instantly remind the reader of the earlier writers. God is referred to as 'Essential Infinite Love',¹²⁸ as 'the Principal Efficient, the Supreme Directive, and the Ultimate final Cause of Man'.¹²⁹ God as being, and the unity of God are paramount in Baxter's conception of the divine. Simultaneously, we must note that there is certainly nothing in Baxter of the via negativa, which so often accompanied the neo-Platonic view of God. On the contrary, Baxter is

a clear believer in the via positiva; his somewhat un-Puritan awareness of the beauty of the natural world was at one with his belief that through sensibility of this man is drawn upwards to the perception of its creator. Thus true knowledge of creatures will always lead to knowledge and love of God.¹³⁰ Man's proper end in life is this knowledge of God, whose goodness is 'the ultimately ultimate object of Man's soul'.¹³¹

As in The Cloud, so in The Saints Everlasting Rest, man's natural knowledge of God was lost with his Fall, and therefore it is only with the redeeming work of Christ and the gift of grace that man may be restored once more to his knowledge of God. Grace is prevenient, and there is nothing in Baxter of the slight tension we remarked earlier in the anonymous writer. 'If God move us not, we cannot move'.¹³² There is also an emphasis, not found in the medieval work, that God can never be approached directly: 'Wholly depend on the Mediation of Christ, the great Reconciler. Without him there is no coming near to God'.¹³³ Baxter has the motif which the author of The Cloud and Walter Hilton had both used, of Christ as the door to perfection, but without the addendum that he is also the porter. The balance of divinity and humanity is thus less concisely expressed, although clearly there, as seen in the reference to Jesus as the pattern of self-denial, the example as well as the way-maker.¹³⁴ Baxter also has a Trinitarian slant very familiar to the reader to The Cloud, emphasising the way Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier

work together to draw man up to God, although there is less emphasis on the unity of the Trinity and the Godhead as man's goal.

The concept of sanctification is very strong in Baxter, and there is no doubt in his mind that the process leads to perfection, and some sort of union with God, as he speaks of 'our Redeemer restoring and advancing us to blessed Union with Himself...our Sanctifier and Glorifier preparing us for and bringing us to Celestial Perfection'.¹³⁵ His depiction of the way to perfection again bears some resemblance to that of the medieval mystics. We have already referred to Baxter's use of the via positiva,¹³⁶ but side-by-side with this is the belief that creation will only help us if it is in its proper place, therefore the seeker for perfection must not attach too much value to things of this world. The author of The Cloud was also prepared to concede that something of the greatness of God might be seen through his creatures, but this was definitely a lower way, and for the true contemplative the danger was in valuing wordly things at all, whereas for Baxter it is simply over-valuing them. The disregard for the body which so characterised earlier mystics and spirituals is alien to Baxter, and his statement that 'We have Bodies as well as Souls and must have a just Regard to Bodily Necessaries',¹³⁷ has no more in common with The Cloud's teaching on discretion than it does with St. Francis' references to Brother Ass. At the same time, however, Baxter is insistent

that the carnal self must be denied, and the will utterly subordinated to God's, for 'A Will that is not dependent on God's Will is an idol'.¹³⁸ Unless self is denied, then God is denied, and in order to deny self, all worldly pleasures 'worldly talk, pleasing accommodations, ease and quietness',¹³⁹ must be forsaken. Thus the way of purgation of the medieval mystics is a part of Baxter's understanding of sanctification, although the claim that 'To be joyful in tribulation should be no strange Matter to a Saint',¹⁴⁰ does not capture the bleakness and loneliness of some earlier writings on the subject.

Baxter is aware that other men may contribute to the difficulties experienced by the spiritual man, and to highlight this uses the story of Mary and Martha so beloved of the medieval mystics, but notably with a very different slant. The pre-Reformation writers used it to illustrate the difference between the active and the contemplative; for Baxter, however, the sisters merely represent those who are wholly devoted to God, and those who still have some concern for the world. However, like the author of The Cloud Baxter describes Jesus' actions in the situation as those of an advocate, defending Mary against her sister's charges, but while the medieval writer denies that he acted as judge, as Martha requested,¹⁴¹ Baxter affirms that he acted as both advocate and judge.¹⁴² By use of the biblical motif, both writers exhort their readers not to be discouraged by the disapproval of others, for God will always defend those who are especially loved by him.

On the subject of whether the spiritual man will live in society, or in the solitary life, Baxter is closer to Hilton's or to Meister Eckhart's beliefs than to the author of The Cloud; he does not assume that the solitary life is the context, for it is the duty of some men to remain in the world. 'You must not causelessly withdraw from Humane Society into Solitude'.¹⁴³

Some do withdraw from the world to lead a solitary life, because they are called to do so; but in many cases, says Baxter, the reasons for with-drawing are false.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, Baxter hastens to reassure those who are genuinely called that their solitude is valuable, and they are not truly alone as God is with them.¹⁴⁵

For Baxter as for the author of The Cloud the crucial factor in the search for perfection is man's love for God, which must be the dominating force in his life. This love is kindled in us by Christ,¹⁴⁶ a distinction in the Godhead not found in The Cloud, and there is also an emphasis on the mutuality of love - 'God doth most certainly Love all that Love Him'¹⁴⁷ - not found in The Cloud. However, the wholeheartedness of man's love for God is as uncompromising as in the anonymous work: 'The work of Love must be the work of our whole Life,¹⁴⁸ for 'Love is the Life of Religion, and of the Soul ... the great command and summary of all the Law ... God's image'.¹⁴⁹ As in The Cloud the link between love and will is strong: 'Our Love is nothing but our Will'.¹⁵⁰ It is undoubtedly our love for God which makes possible the

union with him, 'The Love of God is our uniting adhesion to him'.¹⁵¹

And so we come to the question of the union itself. It has become apparent that Baxter envisages a union of some sort, speaking not only of knowledge and vision of God, but also of an actual union.¹⁵²

As in The Cloud it is clear that this is only achieved in the after-life. On earth God is known only 'as in a Glass, and hereafter in his Glory, as face to face',¹⁵³ when our partial knowledge becomes full knowledge.¹⁵⁴

On earth we are, however, granted foretastes of this full joy and perfection,¹⁵⁵ and 'Love is the very foretaste of Heaven'.¹⁵⁶

But what is the nature of this union? Baxter makes very clear what it is not. It is part of man's essence that he is an individual, 'And therefore no Man must under pretence of Self-denial either destroy himself or yet with some Hereticks aspire to be essentially and personally one with God, so that their individual personality should be drowned in him as a drop in the Ocean'.¹⁵⁷

Not surprisingly, there is here no absorption mysticism! Neither is there any talk of the complete emptying of the mind that is required if the individual is to be lifted up in pure contemplation of God. Instead, in keeping with his use of the via

positiva, Baxter emphasises the knowledge of God which interacts with love. This is not knowledge as found in The Cloud, better expressed in German than English, Kenntnis, but rather of the same nature as the knowledge we have of creatures,

Wissenschaft, and so the rational faculty is at work all along the way, for 'It is our Rational faculty that proveth us Men'.¹⁵⁸ At the same time, Baxter is aware, as was the medieval writer, of the potential danger of this kind of knowledge, for the devil uses man's desire for knowledge as a temptation and a trick.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, his emphasis on a rational knowledge of God as a parallel complement to loving knowledge recalls St. Augustine much more strongly than the medieval mystics, and once more we find that, having trodden a similar path for so long, Baxter and The Cloud part company. More than anything, it is the complete absence, in Baxter's writings, of contemplation as the penultimate stage in man's progress towards perfection which indicates the gulf between the two, for The Cloud's union is contemplative union. Nor is there any elitism in Baxter, no indication that the full union and knowledge is achieved by very few, and is a higher degree of perfection than can be achieved by very few, and is a higher degree of perfection than can be achieved by the ordinary Christian; on the contrary, the indications are that the saint's everlasting rest is a condition available to all.

Therefore, we seem to be left with two possible conclusions. First, that all likenesses between Richard Baxter and the medieval mystics are superficial and accidental only, for in essence the two were worlds apart. The second is, that these likenesses do stem from similar outlook, similar desires and aspirations, but for a variety of reasons, historical

circumstances not least, Richard Baxter could not go so far even as the unitas spiritus of The Cloud, for all that this was a fairly safe and moderate stance in its day.

Francis Rous, while always retaining the title of 'Puritan' was not so truly representative of the mainstream of Puritan thought as was Richard Baxter. On the surface at least, his writings, more than those of any other Puritan writer, recall the teachings of the medieval mystics, and his concern with the union of the soul and God is much more immediately striking and apparently single-minded than that of his contemporaries. Rous' via media between the Puritan spirituals and the medieval mystics is well exemplified in his interpretation of the Song of Songs; G.F. Nuttall points out¹⁶⁰ that the Puritans used this as a basis for treatises just as much as did medieval writers, but Rous was untypical of his age in that, while the norm was to use it as an allegory for the union between Christ and the church, Rous refers to marriage between Christ and the individual soul.¹⁶¹ In this way he set himself apart from his contemporaries, although whether or not he simultaneously alligned himself with the position of the medieval mystics, we may discern in due course.

Rous was well versed in the writers who had been so important in the development of mystical doctrine, notably Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius, Richard of St. Victor, and St. Bernard. Although he was somewhat scathing of philosophy

and 'natural' knowledge, and his language is not so strikingly neo-Platonic as Baxter's, there are overtones of a neo-Platonic background. First, in his belief that unity is the hallmark of Christ's kingdom, division the hallmark of Satan's.¹⁶² Secondly, in his belief that the movement of the soul towards God is a proper and natural one, and as in The Cloud this is combined with orthodox doctrine on the Fall and grace. It is natural for man to seek perfection and happiness, and in the beginning his search was straightforward. However, the fall from grace hindered it, surrounding man with the obstacles of this world. He is thus deviated in his search, attempting to find happiness in earthly pleasures or knowledge. Dissatisfied, for 'The World ... is our misery rather than our happiness',¹⁶³ he must eventually climb above the world, 'His soul must set up the ladder of contemplation, and there-on she must ascend up to her Master'.¹⁶⁴ This is only possible, first through the redeeming work of Christ, then through God's gift of grace to the individual, 'For nothing but God can turn man's heart unto God'.¹⁶⁵

The way towards union is not straightforward and easy, but one of uphill struggle as man attempts to put behind him his love of earthly things. Self-emptying is still a necessity: 'Let us present ourselves, as vessels empty and altogether void'.¹⁶⁶ There can only be one husband for the soul,¹⁶⁷ as the author of The Cloud puts it, 'he is a jealous lover'.¹⁶⁸ However, in a manner more akin to the Victorines than to the

author of The Cloud, Rous is very positive about creation, declaring that all created things contain a spark 'of infinite goodness',¹⁶⁹ and thus from the created world our thoughts are led up towards God; 'the Creation should direct our thoughts to the creator'.¹⁷⁰ Thus there is in his schema some room for love of creatures, however much lower this must be than our love of God. As a concomitant of this, there is an emphasis on action and involvement in the world, even a statement that good works are rewarded: 'And as he forgets their sins, he remembers their good works, to reward and Crown them'.¹⁷¹ Yet there is underlying this the belief of the author of The Cloud, that this life is merely a journey towards the perfection and fulfillment of the next, that nothing should come in the way of the man who seeks God, and that God will take care of and provide for him in this life, for 'He that sets us on a journey will give us food in the journey'.¹⁷² That the journey will be a difficult one is obvious. Man's necessary humiliation is emphasised;¹⁷³ there will be periods of loneliness when Christ's presence is withdrawn.¹⁷⁴ Yet this suffering and affliction must be welcomed and gladly borne, for out of it will come rewards in heaven. 'Therefore, if by lesser weight of temporal grief, thou purchase the exceeding weight of eternal joy, thou art yet a great gainer'.¹⁷⁵ On earth too there will be comfort and consolation, in one's knowledge of one's service to God, and one's eyes must not be turned from the end goal. 'And let oure eyes be continually on

the joys which follow, and not on the pain which is present ... Let us be so minded as God and his Christ are, and walk on valiantly in sanctified misery unto true felicitie'.¹⁷⁶

The submission of one's will to God's is essential: 'Let thy patience be merely grounded in submission to his will'.¹⁷⁷

Over-riding all self-discipline, however, is love, for even obedience, we are told, is rooted in love of God.¹⁷⁸

It is man's capacity for love which makes possible the direct encounter with God: 'There is a chamber within us, and a bed of love in that chamber, wherein Christ meets and rests with the soul'.¹⁷⁹

The feeling of love warms men and draws them towards God, giving a foretaste of the ultimate joy, it 'presents to the view of the world some bunches of grapes brought back from the land of promise'.¹⁸⁰

The individual must nurture the growth of love in his soul, 'kindle your love',¹⁸¹ and seek only God as its goal: 'Let my love rest in nothing short of thee, neither let it be content to rest in thee, but kindle it, enflame it, enlarge it, that it may rest largely in thee'.¹⁸²

We have already remarked in other Puritans the importance of love, but only here in Rous' writings do we find something like the obsession with love which colours many mystical works, The Cloud in particular. Love is not simply a means to an end, but a way of life; thus the allegory of the mystical marriage is a singularly appropriate one, although 'The joy of love and union in an earthly marriage cannot express a heavenly joy that is spiritually pure and

and purely active'.¹⁸³

The experience to which this overwhelming love leads the individual again has much in common with medieval works. A visitation from Jesus may be recognised by certain signs - a feeling of light, of spiritual joy and holiness, of heat, power and love - strongly reminiscent of Richard Rolle. The soul is envisaged as reaching ever outwards and upwards, and in moments of high ecstasy actually being taken out of itself in a vision of God: 'Let her often go out of the body, yea out of the world by heavenly contemplations'.¹⁸⁴ Nowhere else among the Puritans do we find a description so close to the contemplative prayer of the medieval mystics. Nor do we feel that, in Rous as in some Puritans, a similarity of language leads us to believe in a similarity stronger in appearance than in reality. Rous is actually using the language of the mystics to describe something, if not identical to their experiences, at least closely akin to them.

So we come to the actual union with God. Other Puritans speak of a union, but as we have seen with Richard Baxter, it is not the union as envisaged by medieval mystics. To which tradition does Rous show his allegiance? L. Bouyer believes with G. Wakefield that Rous always holds to the Puritan belief that the soul remains distinct from God throughout, and that there is constant need of Christ as mediator: 'Once more we come up against the infinite distance between Christ and the soul, even when saved, justified and sanctified, the

absolute and permanent dependence of the soul on Christ'.¹⁸⁵ There is certainly in Rous as in other Puritans a stronger emphasis on the mediating work of Christ, than in The Cloud. This difference is epitomised in Rous' reference to the 'pure counterpart' of unclean human nature. In Meister Eckhart this would have been a reference to the uncreated spark in every soul, in Rous it is a reference to the perfect man, Jesus Christ: 'Thou art indeed too unclean to touch God in an immediate unity; but there is a pure counterpart of thy nature, and that pure humanity is immediately knit to the purest Deitie'.¹⁸⁶ Hence in his treatise on the mystical marriage, Christ is the bridegroom of the soul, and his use of this allegory is in character with his whole vision of the spiritual journey, whereas in The Cloud its use would have distracted from the concentration on the Godhead; although Rous is clear that the ultimate aim of union with Christ is union with the Godhead: 'When men acknowledge Christ, in whom is the Trinity united to man, to be happines ... the way ... they are one with Christ'.¹⁸⁷ Thus, Rous seemed to be aiming for a union with the Trinity in Christ. Elsewhere, he speaks of the union as one between father and child,¹⁸⁸ so emphasising the gap that must always remain, and the difference in the status of God and man. There is certainly no notion of absorption mysticism; yet as we know not all mystics propound this, and certainly the author of The Cloud did not. Like the anonymous writer, Rous emphasises that vision on

earth is always unclear, and the dark cloud is described as a wall. The soul 'looks by a chink, with the eye of a spiritual light into heaven, and so has a glimpse of him for whom she is sick of love; for he stands behind a wall, this earth of ours is a partition betwixt us and him'.¹⁸⁹ Only in the next life 'shall she see her beloved clearly and plainly, even face to face'.¹⁹⁰

But in his understanding of the achievement of the contemplative on earth, Rous is more cautious than was the earlier writer, denying outright a direct contact with the Godhead; in his understanding of the ultimate vision, however, Rous is less clear. The marriage motif is still there, but there seems to be also a possibility of direct contact with God. This appears most tellingly in a single reference to the beatific vision: 'But a godly man walking with God before his time is nearer to God in his death, and advanced to a nearer nearness by death. He was with God before his time, by an union of Faith and Love, and now is with him in a presential and beatific vision unto all Eternity'.¹⁹¹ The beatific vision was the essence of the contemplative tradition; although there were many variations in mystical doctrine, the beatific vision was a constant, the ultimate goal of all contemplatives, the full and perfect union with God, only attainable in the next life. For some, the union might be of substance, for some, including the author of The Cloud it was of spirit, but for all it was a direct union with the Godhead. If Rous wishes

to speak only of a union with Christ, he would not have used this traditional phrase inaccurately.

Simultaneously, however, we must not forget that he did emphasise the role of Christ in achieving this union in a way medieval writers did not, so he is not identical with them. Rather, he falls halfway between the Puritans and the medieval mystics. For the latter, Christ's redemptive work and mediating role lead directly and immediately to union between the contemplative and God; for Rous, there is a union with Christ which then makes way for union with the Godhead. Clearly, Rous found much within the mystical tradition that was congenial to his own inclinations - we might even claim that, at heart, he was a mystic in the medieval sense, but ultimately his stance had to be strongly influenced by predominant contemporary thought, and so he emerged with something that was neither fully mystical, nor fully Puritan. Nevertheless, the strength of the medieval influence on this seventeenth-century writer cannot be over-emphasised, and we must not allow the differences to blind us to how remarkably close he was to his predecessors on some of the essential issues.

William Law

By the eighteenth century mystical literature of the type of The Cloud - or of any type - was becoming rare in England. Historians chart a movement away from theological prose towards Romantic poetry which seems, in William Blake and in the Lakeland poets, to retain some elements of a sense

of union. However in the first quarter of the eighteenth century there was a writer whose thought was distinctly influenced in its earlier phase by the great medieval mystics - William Law. Law takes the approach of classical medieval mysticism in Christian Perfection (1726) and A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life. (1729), with much emphasis on self denial and negation. 'They call us to renounce the world, and differ in every temper and way of life, from the spirit and the way of the world; to renounce all it's goods.'¹⁹² 'The one true way of dying to self wants no cells, monasteries or pilgrimages. It is the way of patience, humility and resignation to God,' (cited Enc. Brit. vol IX p549). The changed times are reflected in the polemics against medieval structures found in this quotation from The Spirit of Love (part the first); yet one feels that he is not far from The Cloud in emphasis. For Law, humility is 'the life and soul of piety',¹⁹³ founded in a true awareness of our sin and weakness, and meditations on these will bring the Christian to the true humility essential for salvation. There is thus a distinct shift from the teaching of The Cloud that only imperfect humility can be achieved in this way, perfect humility being founded on awareness of God's greatness.¹⁹⁴ Law emphasises the hard work required to gain entrance into heaven, declaring that things which seem hard and unpleasant are in fact the only means by which the highest joy may be attained.¹⁹⁵

Throughout the time of suffering, prayer is man's constant

comfort, for through it, says Law, we ascend as close to God as is possible in this life.¹⁹⁶ Law, like the author of The Cloud recommends a mixture of formal and private prayer,¹⁹⁷ giving detailed and precise instructions as to when, how, and what one should pray, in the ordinary course of events. But he also declares that sometimes one is lifted up so high as to be beyond vocalised prayer: 'Sometimes the light of God's countenance shines so bright upon us, we see so far into the invisible world, we are so affected with the wonders of the love and goodness of God, that our hearts worship and adore in a language higher than that of words, and we feel transports of devotion, which can only be felt'.¹⁹⁸ On the surface, this may seem to come very close to the ineffable experience of contemplative prayer; in fact it is clear from the context that this is an experience any Christian may feel. Nevertheless, Law is closer on this point to teaching on contemplative prayer - as is John Downname, with his 'sudden short ejaculation',¹⁹⁹ of private prayer - than to other Puritans, for example John Owen who believed that mental prayer was potentially highly dangerous.²⁰⁰

Earlier we noted the altered attitudes towards the spiritual institutions of the church which arose from the Reformation. Still William Law shows his affinity with the Middle Ages, declaring that throughout the history of Christianity there have been two types of person, the active and the contemplative, and that of the two the contemplative life is the better,

for there are 'higher degrees of perfection in a virgin state of life'.²⁰¹ Therefore, it is not surprising that many choose this better part, although Law bemoans the fact that there is a tendency today for it to be neglected, not accorded its deserved value. This typically medieval reference to the two forms of life is unusual among Protestants, and certainly indicated some pre-Reformation influence.

As regards the type of his mysticism Law is closer to the Puritans with their Christ-mysticism than to the Trinitarian mysticism of The Cloud. He rejected, however, the protestant notion of total depravity and asserted that there was a divine spark in all humans, the eternal word of God hidden within. However he understood this to mean Christ in particular. "Law speaks constantly of the 'inner Christ' as the divine Life in the soul, the Word or Wisdom of God, revealed wherever men are moved by the spirit of prayer which is the desire for union with God". (S. Spencer in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., volume IV, pp548f.). For Law God must become everything he is to be thought of, loved and served in all things, men must 'learn to love God with all their heart, all their strength'.²⁰² 'Devotion is nothing else but right apprehensions and right religion in the heart'.²⁰³

The influence of Law lessened after 1733 with his development into a greater consciousness of direct inward relation between man and "a universe of invisible reality" (R.M. Jones in Hastings Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, volume IX,

pl03). The tenor of the age was against him.

What, then, has emerged from a study of Puritan writings? What, if anything, has been proven about the relationship between medieval English mystics, and later English spirituality? We can only claim with certainty two negative factors. First, that we will search in vain for the survival, within Protestantism, of a mysticism identical to that of the Middle Ages. Only on the continent did true Dionysian mysticism such as that of The Cloud survive and flourish, notably in the writings of St. John of The Cross. Secondly, that even if Protestant writers were content to learn from pre-Reformation writers, they would hardly acknowledge this, and so everything must be conjecture, nothing incontrovertible. But on the positive side, several things may be suggested. The spiritual tradition of the Catholic church did not end with the reformation; the Church of England, while having new sources to draw from, did not entirely discard the old. English texts were more readily available than translations of German or French; the spirituality of the medieval mystics was a spirituality not simply of the church, but of the English, suited to their temperament and expressed in their language. Tolerance, level-headedness and humour were uniquely blended with a high spirituality, and these qualities were still a part of the Puritan outlook. We cannot particularise, we cannot suggest that one writer more than any other was important to the Puritans

although Walter Hilton's heavier Christological emphasis may have made him more obviously congenial; therefore above comparisons with The Cloud should not be taken as claiming that this work was the influence. It was the tradition as a whole, not works in particular, which was important - the tradition of which The Cloud was a major part, and to which it made such original and valuable contribution. It might be said that the Puritans, on the whole, lost the true value of The Cloud and its contemporaries, as if, finding a beautifully carved and wrought chest, they overlooked the treasure within. Nevertheless, the works were used, they had that within them which made them valuable in more than one way, and so, being adaptable, they survived. Only Francis Rous came really close to understanding and following the essence of mystical thought; but nevertheless The Cloud's role in other writers' thought, misused, perhaps, or misunderstood, is still a part of its history - although perhaps a part its author, with his very elitist attitude, would not have been happy to witness.

103. J. Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. J.T. McNeill, trans, F.L. Battles, Library of Christian Classics, S.C.M. press, London, 1961, vol. 20, p.687. Hereafter cited as J. Calvin, Institutes.
104. J. Calvin, Institutes, p.589
105. I. Murray, The Puritan Hope, Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1971, p. 97.
106. M. Thornton, English Spirituality, SPCK, London, 1963. Hereafter cited as M. Thornton, English Sprituality.
107. M. Thornton, English Spirituality, p. 231.
108. For example his teaching on the relationship between the body and the soul.
109. See R. Jones, Spiritual Reformers, for a discussion of Everard and his affinity with Dionysian mysticism.
110. Discussed in R.Jones, Spiritual Reformers, p. 254.
111. T. Brooks, Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices, Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1968, p. 31. Hereafter cited as T. Brooks, Precious Remedies.
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AFTERWORD

As stated in the preface, the intention of this thesis has been to study The Cloud and its place in the Christian mystical tradition; its background, the writers and ideas who influenced the anonymous author; the unique blend of orthodox western theology and the more esoteric teachings of Dionysian mysticism, down-to-earth advice juxtaposed with passages of such strength and beauty that they almost seem to express the inexpressible, which put the works of the Cloud-corpus at the very summit of the mystical tradition; and the possible role The Cloud played in post-Reformation spirituality - a sad anti-climax, some might say. Within this study, there is still scope for further research, particularly in the latter area, but with today's growing interest in the phenomenology of religion, another obvious avenue of research is to consider The Cloud in the context of mysticism as a phenomenon.

Work of this kind has, indeed, been going on for some time, in the form of an interest in Zen meditation, on the part of many within the Christian contemplative tradition; Thomas Merton was by no means unique, in this. However, for all the appearance of similarity between the two, the differences between Zen meditation and Christian contemplation are profound. The overwhelming love of God, which motivates the mystic and reaches fulfillment in union with him is the essence of the contemplative life; Zen meditation knows nothing of this, and thus the search

for a common vision must come to an early and abrupt halt. Other faiths, however, may well prove more fruitful in the search for real likeness and common ground. Islamic Sufism, with its monastic-type organisation, the belief in a structured, step-by-step movement towards experience of the divine, the ultimate goal of unity, and even the controversy within that tradition over whether or not the soul is annihilated in its union with God, is strongly reminiscent of the Christian contemplative tradition. Thus, it may be that a major step forward in appreciation of Christian mysticism, and particularly of those works such as The Cloud which owe so much to the east, is in seeking an understanding of The Cloud et al as based in Christian doctrine, but not limited by it; to see the mysticism of The Cloud not simply as part of the Christian experience, but of the human religious experience.

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